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SELF-REALISATION

LIFE & TEACHINGS

OF

RAMANA MAHARSHI

BY

B. V. NARASIMHA AYYAR

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B. V. NARASIMHA SWAMI

स्कैन्ड/Scanned

PUBLISHED BY

NIRANJANANANDA SWAMI

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CONTENTS

		PAGE.
	Foreword	1
I.	Who is this?	5
II.	A Family Trait	10
III.	Which of the Three?	13
IV.	Glimpses of the Dawn	16
V.	Born Anew	19
VI.	Crossing the Rubicon	25
VII.	A Word in Parting	28
VIII.	Flight from Home in Quest of his Father.	33
IX.	At the Father's Feet	40
X.	Years of Strenuous Life	49
XI.	Traced at last	60
XII.	The Light on the Hill	67
XIII.	The Swami and Book-lore	72
XIV.	M. Sivaprakasam Pillai and the Swami ...	76
XV.	Ganapati Sastri and the Swami ...	85
XVI.	M. V. Ramaswamy Iyer, Echammal, Raghavachari	95
XVII.	F. H. Humphreys and the Swami ...	107
XVIII,	Instructions to F. H. Humphreys ...	111
XIX.	Annoyances from Sadhus	118
XX.	With Relatives Again	130
XXI.	Ramana Maharshi and Seshadriswami ...	144
XXII.	A Robbery at the Asram ...	156
XXIII.	Animal Companions	167
XXIV.	Giripradakshinam, Sacred Hill Circuit ...	182
XXV.	A Day at the Asram	192
XXVI.	Meditation at the Asram	209
XXVII.	Later Devotees	227
XXVIII.	A Western Devotee	243
XXIX.	„ *Contd.*	254
	Appendix	262

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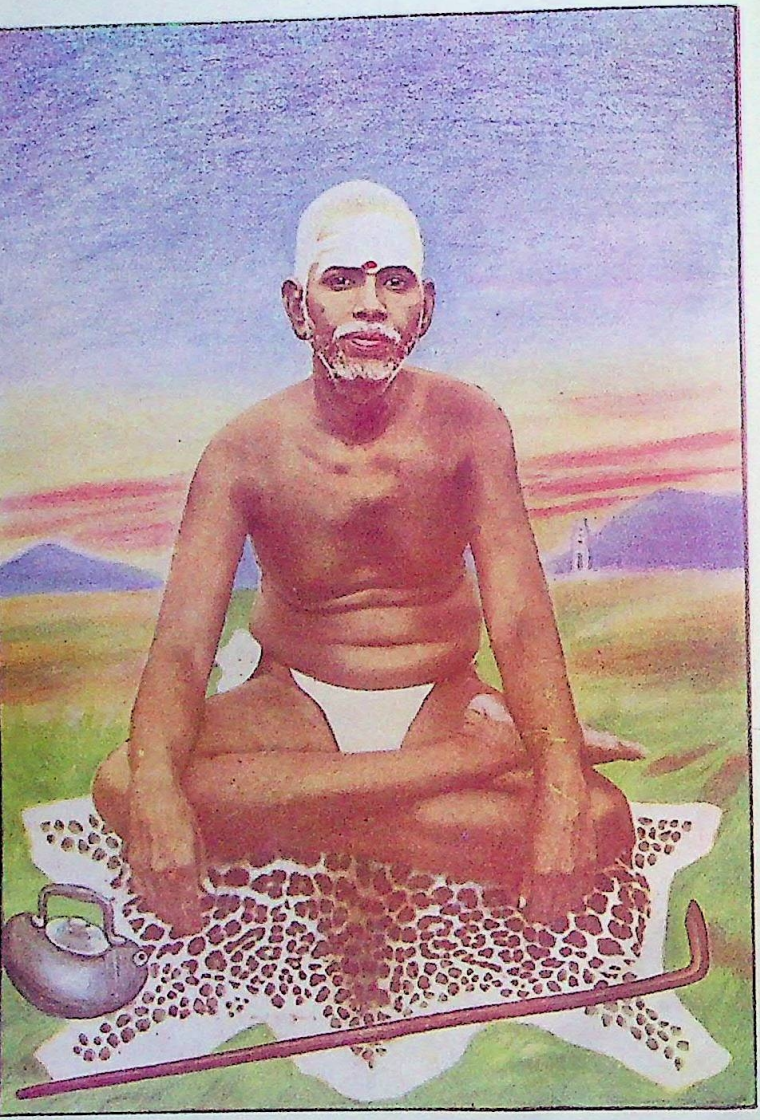

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

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FOREWORD

I consider it a rare privilege accorded to me, that I should be asked to write a prefatory note to a book on the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great sage who is adorning the sacred hillside in Tiruvannamalai. In the dispensation of Providence, it was my good fortune to have had access to a sage, who shines in the spiritual firmament as a bright star, guiding the restless and depressed way-farer along the path towards the haven of true and lasting happiness.

Dazzled as the majority of mankind are at the phantoms of this illusory world, frantic are their efforts to clutch at them, under a false sense of satisfaction; but they are ever tantalized in the fruition of their yearning: and late in their span of life, do they feel a pang of regret for having wasted their precious time in seeking after shadows oblivious of the reality. The life and example of this great saint serve as a beacon light to warn us about the pitfalls in the path of worldliness and guide us on the safe path of spirituality. His magnetic influence is a boon. One brief remark of his dispels sometimes a thick cloud of doubt, a heaving heart is soothed by a short sermon of his, and even the knotty conundrums of abstruse philosophy find satisfactory solution from his simple exposition, emerging forth from the fountain of his intuition.

It is a sorry spectacle, how slow is the response to the clarion call of this living monument of spiritual glory and how few are those who make a genuine

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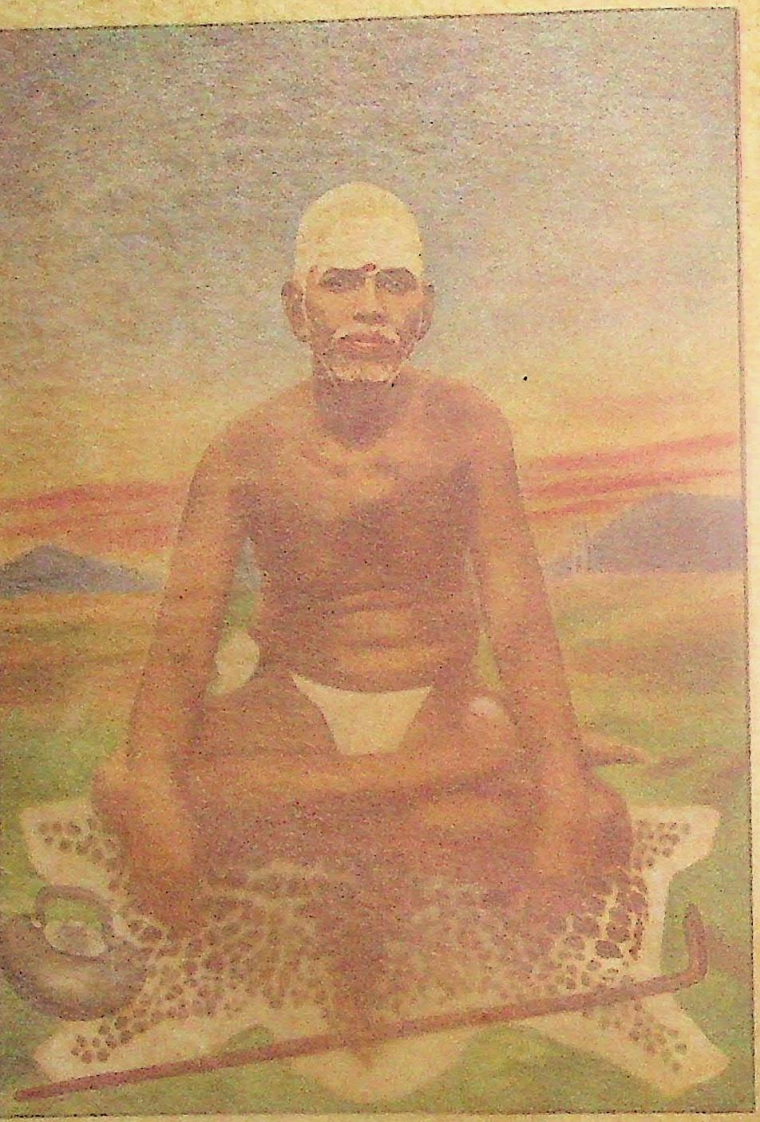

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attempt to realize what this sage has attained. His evolution is so far ahead of the average humanity of to-day, that he dwells in the transcendent sphere of spiritual consciousness, his physical body and senses being no impediment to the realization of his true inner self. To him, the illusion of the physical world is no longer a veil to hide the substratum of all phenomena. It has been a transparent medium for him. The mind, the arch-juggler, is to him a docile and faithful servant. His favourite sermon is "Retreat ever within thine own self; seek the source whence the restless mind spins out an unceasing web of thoughts; brush aside the springing thoughts; concentrate at the root of thought; and take repose in that stillness and quietude. So much is thy effort, and what next is one for experience and inner realisation, and does not admit of exposition in words." Few have reached this abode of bliss.

Another gem of spiritual truth which this holy sage places for our gaze is: "Happiness is really an inner attitude, or a subjective realization of the mind, though many are under a misapprehension that it depends upon external conditions only." The outer quest for happiness, he would say, will only be the game of "Hide and Seek." He used to say that by a wise adaptation of the attitude to changing events and environments, it is in our power to preserve a state of unruffled mentality. Much of the sorrow, misery, and depression, can be averted by the practice of such an adaptation, which is, of course, based on wise discrimination. Real happiness is one that does not depend upon anything external to one's self. It is unconditioned bliss and therefore permanent.

Know the "I." That is how he would ask us to tackle the problem of life. The words are simple, but

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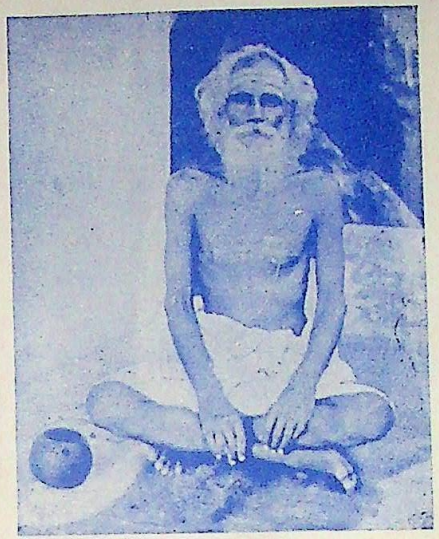
K. Sundaram Chetty
Ex-Judge, High Court, Madras



B. V. Narasimha Swami

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their conception has baffled many a brilliant intellect. Here again, he would say the mere intellectual disquisitions are hardly enough, but success lies in unflinching practice, with a sincere yearning for the attainment of the true purpose of life. Many a sceptic who scoffs at such great spiritual personages as visionary and unpractical would begin to doubt his own scepticism, if only he tries to visit this sage, and remains within the ambit of his spiritual aura for an appreciable length of time.

I sincerely congratulate the author of this book, who has rendered a useful service to the present generation as also to posterity, by sparing no pains in gathering information about the incidents in the life of this holy sage and about his talks and sayings, which a limited number of disciples and admirers have had opportunities to hear, and by embodying them in the chapters of this book in the author's felicitous and lucid style, in a masterly way. It may not be out of place, if I should observe in this preface, that the author of this book happens to be my classmate and colleague at the Bar in my younger days and that the link of old friendship has again brought us together in connection with his book, dealing with the life and teachings of a great sage, whom we both adore.

(Sd.) K. SUNDARAM CHETTY,

High Court Judge.

78, Poonamallee High Road, Madras.

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CHAPTER I

WHO IS THIS?

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are georgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in King's courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.

Tiruvannamalai is a small municipality in a corner of the North Arcot District. The people are quiet, and

"Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They keep the noiseless tenor of *their* way."

The temple and the hill of Arunachala, however, are sacred in the eyes of the Hindus throughout the Presidency—especially of the Saivites. The chief festival that attracts large crowds is the ten-days' festival in Kartikai (November—December). From the fifth day, a cattle fair also is usually held and the roads are covered day and night by masses thronging to see the temple processions, decorations, fireworks, cattle-sales, etc. The crowds gather mostly in three places—at the temple, at the cattle fair, and at a garden near the Palitirtham. The former two require no explanation. But what is there in the third? Let us peep in and see.

The garden is some forty yards north of the Chengam Road. A large sheet of water, coming almost to the road level, the Palitirtham tank flanks it on the west. A few cocoanut, plantain and mango trees form the front view and screen the interior from the road. Proceeding beyond these, we notice a few old thatched cottages

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and a new tiled structure at one end of a flower garden skirted by the babbling brook at the foot of the hill. What an imposing and inspiring background the hill forms for this forest hermitage! How gracefully does it slope down, in condescension, as it were, to meet the Asram, to blend and harmonise with its grove and tank, its thatch and flowers, to present the beauteous face of nature. On that face is writ large (what eyes free of earth-stain can clearly discern), Calm Peace, Perpetual Bliss, stretching, where no eye can follow, into the very centre of the earth; Lofty Height, ever soaring upward, onward, and heavenward pointing to (and bidding the awe-struck gazer's heart to arise, aspire and be lost in) the infinite expanse above. "What a lovely spot for quiet peaceful meditation, and ecstatic absorption," a visitor remarks. Perhaps. But just now, at the Kartikai festival, the scene is *not* quiet. A ceaseless stream of men, women and children is pouring in from the road, and proceeding towards the small southern cottage. What do these go to see?

Or, in the words of Sankey,

"What means this eager, anxious throng,
Which moves with busy haste along,
These wondrous gatherings day by day,
What means this strange commotion pray?
In accents hushed the throng reply,"
The Swami's nigh; to his feet we fly.

On yonder platform, upon a tiger-skin, sits a medium-sized figure, past middle age, with fair though somewhat sun-browned complexion and unshaven head and face, naked except for a cod-piece (*Koupinam*).* He

*Cod piece (Koupina) is a narrow strip of cloth tied vertically for the sake of decency, like a truss, to a horizontal strip of cloth running round the waist.

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sits like a Roman philosopher's statue, serene and motionless, with a steady gaze, directed at nothing in particular. Hundreds sit, stand, or pass before him, gazing into his eyes all the while. Yet he winces not, winks not, turns not. What bright, glittering eyes are his! Do you examine them closely? What calm, what peace, and what unshaken firmness are there! What profound depths of meaning do they not draw you into! And if you still persevere, unawed and undismayed, what giddy heights of heaven do they not help you to soar into! If people tired of their earthly and spiritual wanderings do but look into them, what balmy influence, what silent bliss do they not shed! Truly, that which gleams through the face of Nature here shines also within those eyes. Is he but a forest hermit, or the Sylvan Spirit, the Genius of the wood and the hill?

In front of that figure, a bamboo fencing is erected to keep off the rush; and large numbers are seated or standing in front, leaving a narrow strip, a yard wide between themselves and the fencing, for the stream of visitors to pass through. The new-comers file through this strip and, as they approach that figure, fall prostrate and tender such presents (of cocoanut, plantains, flowers, raisins, candy, camphor, etc.) as they may have brought with them. The attendant within the fencing receives these offerings and returns a part of them as *Prasada* (a blessed gift). The visitor receives it with joy, bows and quickly departs round the cottage. No words are spoken by the visitors and none by that figure. The entire sitting is gone through in solemn silence. This impressive levee goes on for several hours in the morning and is repeated in the afternoon and evening. "What a rush," some new-comer exclaims, as he gladly

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extricates himself from the throng, or gets a peep through it at that figure. He is then informed, that even in other months crowds go and prostrate before him in this way, though only in tens or hundreds, and not in thousands as in Kartikai ; that in those months he is quietly seated in the newly built northern hall, and many resort to him for, and quickly obtain relief from, their mental worries ; that rich and poor, high and low, young and old, are all equally welcome and treated alike ; and that he is free and kind to all.

Let us visit this town once again, say on the night of the tenth day's festival—the "Krittika Deepam." At 6 p. m. the crowning event of that festival takes place. God Arunachala issues out of the temple in a palanquin. Immediately a huge *bonfire* blazes on the crest of the Hill, consuming maunds of ghee and camphor. This burns on for many days and is visible for many miles around. Everywhere the pious devotee watches for it and instantly prostrates before it. For, is not this *bonfire* the visible presentation to all, of the fact that the Hill represents one of the eight forms of God, the form of Fire or Light—whence the Hill is styled "*Tejo Lingun*" (God in the form of light) ? That light, ever visible to the hearts that thrill with faith, is vividly brought home by this fire, even to the poor in faith, the less imaginative souls. Let us get to the forest hermitage at Palitirtham, and see what happens there. In front of that southern cottage is a raised open flat : and on a bench there is seated the figure we already saw. At his feet are rows of men, silent, and prayerful watching for the first gleam of the bonfire. And when it appears, the crowds here also fall down and worship God in the fire-crowned Hill. Instantly there is a blaze of camphor and

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ghee before this figure, and all fall down and worship the inner, and the outer light. Then commences a solemn chant by the devotees,—of a Tamil hymn *Aksharamana-malai*, the praise of God Arunachala as embodied in the Hill—with impassioned cries for realization of the Self, for absorption into Him. The devout listener's heart is stirrred to its depths. This goes on for over an hour ; and the stillness of the night deepens the awe and reverence evoked by the chant.

The visitor's interest is now roused and he questions —Who is this ? How came he to be so deeply revered —nay, worshipped by so many ?

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CHAPTER II

A FAMILY TRAIT

"Oh yet, we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill."

Tennyson : In Memoriam LIV.

Tiruchuzhi is a small village some thirty miles off Madura and eighteen miles from Virudunagar, the nearest railway station, and hence is not favoured by globe-trotters or busy politicians. The temple here is a well-built structure many centuries old, and its Lord has been praised in classic Tamil song by Sundaramurthi and Manikkavachakar. It has long been the head-quarters of a taluk in the Ramnad Setupati's Estate, and contains a few public offices.

Let us look back fifty years, and see Tiruchuzhi of 1879. A busy village or a quiet town, it might then be termed, with five hundred houses or more. Among these we look for that of Sundaram Ayyar, an uncertified pleader practising, mostly, before the local magistrate. He is busy in the mornings with his clients, of whom he has a good number. And he keeps an open house ; many clients with their friends and helpers have their board with him ; nay "every stranger finds a ready chair" at his table. His spacious house of two compartments furnishes accommodation to newly arrived officers before they settle into suitable quarters. As he is very obliging by nature, his help is constantly sought and obtained by officers ; and he is consequently a man of influence. Even criminal

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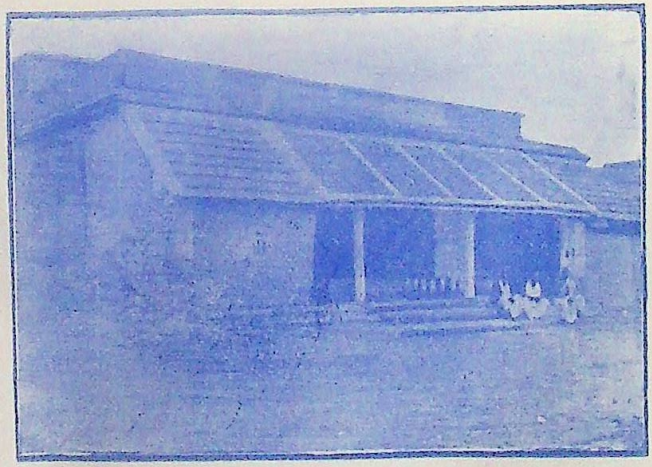
Mr. Sundararamier
Maharshi's Father



Family House at Tiruchuzhi

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classes including highwaymen recognise his goodness and allow his cart to go unmolested. On the whole, for that village, he may be considered a well-to-do and important person.

We are not much interested in his wealth or position, however. Let us rather enquire about his character and attainments, especially in the field of religion, philosophy and spirituality. He was a self-made man who started life on a salary of rupees two per mensem as a village accountant's clerk in his twelfth year. He deserted that for the more chequered and enterprising life of a "petition writer," and ultimately obtained permission to practise as an uncertified pleader. We see him in the annexed picture and his character may well be gleaned from his lineaments therein. We see firmness or dogged determination, endurance, and careful and acute observation of men and things. It is these very qualities that probably contributed to his success in life, and also to that of his more famous son, the subject of this sketch.

As for spirituality, philosophic culture, or religious devotion, Sundaram Ayyar could not boast of any marked trait. He was just like any other prosperous pleader of the time. The priest at home regularly worshipped a set of tiny images and offered the daily food to them before it was served out to the family. Occasional visits to the local temple and sermons, *Kalakshepams* or readings from the sacred legends, and epics at home were all that made up his religion. We note with interest however, a peculiar feature in his family. One member in each generation gave up home and all comforts and turned ascetic. One of Sundaram Ayyar's paternal uncles had donned

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the orange or ochre coloured robe, seized the staff and waterpot and lived on begged food. Ayyar's elder brother also suddenly disappeared from the village, evidently intent on leading the life of an anchorite. Thus, for every generation, the family had contributed an ascetic. There was an interesting anecdote narrated by the old folk about the origin of this family trait. An ascetic once came to the family and was not given due respect, nor even a meal. He left them with a curse that in each generation, one member should turn ascetic and wander in quest of food. Whether this was a blessing or a curse, the sequel may show. Sundaram Ayyar had hardly any idea that any of his sons would renounce the world. At his death in 1892 he left three boys, Nagaswamy aged fourteen, Venkataraman aged twelve, and Nagasundaram aged six, none of whom showed the slightest variation from the usual run of wordly people. The question of interest to the public was, "Will the hoary 'curse' produce any one from this family who will not merely turn ascetic, but also render notable service to his fellow-men in the realms of religion and spirituality?"

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CHAPTER III

WHICH OF THE THREE?

Two men shall be in the field ; the one shall be taken, the other left.

The eldest son, Nagaswamy, was a fairly clever student on whom the family could well have built hopes of improving and advancing its economic interests. He was evidently expected to equip himself by the usual course of general education for a clerical appointment in Government Service with a big plum, a possible "deputy collectorship" looming at its distant end. The last, Nagasundaram, was too young for expectations to be formed or predictions hazarded about his future.

The second son, Venkataraman, seemed quite an unpromising lad. In the matter of study, he was indifferent, and despite his natural shrewdness and keen intelligence, made but poor progress. Often going unprepared to the class, he would hear some other student repeating the day's lesson just once, and would instantly reproduce it from his memory, and forget it before the class was over—so little did he care for study! He seemed more interested in sports and games when he was taken out by his friends, and he would occasionally spend some hours with them in boxing wrestling, swimming, round race, football or gymnastics. Consequently he had a well developed physique; and boys of equal age and even older boys would be in awe of him and behave towards him with due consideration. But all this was, in those days, counted as nothing to a boy's credit;

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and the family was apt to look upon him as a doubtful asset. So far we have taken the usual business point of view regarding the future of these lads. But there is the "curse" or family trait to consider.

Dares any of the three, live
To scorn the earth's delights and strife,
To dedicate to God his life,
To scale the spirit's steepest height,
To scatter thence serenest light,
And warmth on grateful men below,
That else may perish in the snow?

From this standpoint also, no prediction could be made about the third son. The eldest did not seem to have any such turn. The second son seemed to be still less likely "to scorn delights and live laborious days." His past, no doubt, gave a stray hint or two in this direction. He was born under very favourable auspices. At 1 A.M. on 30th December, 1879 (corresponding to Pramathi, Margali 16th), i. e., on *Arudra Darsanam* day, when God Siva had just finished his night's procession through the streets and was about to re-enter the temple, this child was ushered into the world and uttered its first cries. That day is, to the Saivites, a specially holy day. It was on that day that God Nataraja (Siva), had deigned to appear before devout worshippers such as Gautama-muni, Vyaghrapada and Patanjali; and hence its celebration with much fervour. From early dawn the pious visit the sacred tanks, take their bath, and after the customary observances proceed to the temple, secure *darsana* i.e., catch a glimpse of the sacred image amidst huge crowds that pour in, hymn His praise for hours, and accompany the diurnal and nocturnal procession of Siva in village streets and take Him back to the temple at midnight. But if any augury was

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ventured from birth on such a day and at such an hour, Venkataraman's early years seemed disappointing. He was no better, and no worse than any other boy; he would play his pranks on secular and sacred objects alike. Like his father, he drifted into a traditional regard for Saivite worship, whether at home or in the temple, and went through it without experiencing any special emotion. He was not given any training in the sacred language of the Vedas. He picked up his Three R's in the elementary classes at Tiruchuzhi, and spent a year in the first form at Dindigul. His middle school studies were prosecuted in the Scott's Middle School, Madura, and High School studies in the American Mission High School there, wherein he received the only religious instruction he had. But Hindu boys as a rule have an aversion to their Bible classes and pay little attention to the prayers or Bible teaching. Venkataraman cared little for his bread-winning general course, and less for the religious classes.

In fact, till almost the end of his schooldays, he cared at heart for nothing—not even for sports and games. Life had not revealed any purpose or motive strong enough to attract him.

In the result, till 1896, none of the sons of Sundaram Ayyar gave any hint of spiritual development; and it seemed as though the "curse," or the family trait, would operate, or appear if at all, only among their agnatic cousins.

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CHAPTER IV

GLIMPSES OF THE DAWN

"Coming events cast their shadows before."

It is towards the end of 1895 that we notice the first rustle of leaves heralding the coming storm in Venkataraman's life. One day in November, he met an elderly relation from Tiruchuzhi at Madura and accosted him with the usual question "Whence are you coming?" "From Arunachalam," was the dry matter-of-fact reply. But this simple answer acted like a magic spell on the hitherto listless youth. The term "Arunachalam" which he had been accustomed till then to hear without any emotion, suddenly thrilled him with awe and joy, filling his mind with lively ideas of omnipresence and holiness, supreme power and kindness—ideas which clustered round some dimly perceived symbol encompassed by huge compound walls and high towers in some far-off wondrous land where every clod of earth or stone was sacred. In great surprise that some one should have actually seen and returned from such a holy place, the youth exclaimed with evident excitement—"What! From Arunachalam! Where is it?" It was the turn of the relation to be surprised; but he coolly remarked pitying youthful inexperience and ignorance—"What! Do you not know Tiruvannamalai? *That* is, Arunachalam." The spark that glowed for a moment in Venkataraman's breast seemed to be chilled by this reply; and he bestowed no further thought on Arunachalam for a long while.

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But what means this agitation in a hitherto unruffled breast? Is it the smouldering of subterranean fire that will soon overflow and extinguish all traces of the past and turn the present and future into something new, something "rich and strange?" Or is it *only a gentle ripple* in his "subconscious" mind.....

- - - "whose hoarding sense
Gives out at times, he knows not whence,
A little flash, a mystic hint,"

that might still leave the trend of his life unaffected? Who knows?

It was about the same time—perhaps a few months later—that another interesting event happened in his life. He found at home a copy of *Periapuranam* which his uncle had borrowed of some one. This was the first religious book that he went through apart from his class lessons and it interested him greatly. It gave him a novel experience—like the first reading of Arabian Nights to many a youth. It transported him to a different world, so unlike the dry, uninteresting world he had been accustomed to. That book gives a moving account of the sudden accession of faith, deep love of God, utter self-sacrifice, and sublime communion with Him which marked the lives of the sixty-three Tamil saints. As he read on, surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession, thus paying a momentary homage to the grand ideals and ideas that had charmed the hearts and engaged the minds of his countrymen for centuries. But when the book had been quickly read through and laid aside, the new impulses and ideals disappeared leaving him exactly (it seemed) as he was before that study. The dull routine of his life was resumed, and he was plodding on with his

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sixth-form lesson and usual domestic duties in 1896. Was his life then an arid waste that swallowed and parched up all seeds of good that fell into it? Was it a tree that yielded an abundance of wood and branch, bark and leaf—but no flower or fruit?

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CHAPTER V

BORN ANEW

"Ye must be born again."

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूंस्वाम् ॥

"This Atman is not to be attained by recitation of the Vedas, nor by keen intellect, nor by often hearing Scripture. He whom It chooses attains It. To him the Atman reveals Its form."—*Katha Upanishad.*

The crisis of Venkataraman's life, the great awakening that converted his listless and dull life into one of lofty realisation and devotion to ideals, came about in the middle of the year 1896, when he was in his seventeenth year—the age at which the greatest number of religious persons have experienced their "conversion" or started a new life. Changes in one's ideals and nature are always hard for outsiders to follow—especially if they occur in an undemonstrative person always accustomed to self-repression and seldom expressing his thoughts and feelings. As Venkataraman belonged to this type and was a puzzle even to his friends and brothers, it is safest to describe the change in his own words. Long after this event, he was often queried by his devotees as to how he was transformed, and the following is substantially* what he himself said :

* "Substantially."—The exact words have not been recorded. The Swami as a rule talks quite impersonally. There is seldom any clear or pronounced reference to 'I' or 'you' in what he says. The genius of Tamil is specially suited for such impersonal utterance, and he generally talks Tamil. However, one studying his words and ways discovers personal references, mostly veiled. His actual words may be found too colourless, and hazy to suit or appeal to many readers, especially of the Western type. Hence the use here of the customary phraseology with its distinct personal reference.

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" It was about six weeks before I left Madura for good, that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual health. I seldom had any disease. I was a heavy sleeper. When I was at Dindigul in 1891 a huge crowd had gathered close to the room where I slept and tried to rouse me by their shouting, roaring and knocking at the door in vain, and it was only by their getting into my room and giving me a violent shake that I was roused from my torpor. This heavy sleep was rather a proof of good health. I was also subject to fits of half-awake sleep at night. My wily playmates, afraid to trifle with me when I was awake would go to me when I was asleep, rouse me, take me all-round the playground, beat me, cuff me, sport with me, and briug me back to my bed—and all the while I would put up with everything with a meekness, humility, forgiveness, and passivity unknown to my waking state. When the morning broke, I had no remembrance of the night's experiences. But these fits did not render me weaker or less fit for life, and were hardly to be considered as disease. So, on that day as I sat alone, there was nothing wrong with my health. But a sudden and unmistakeable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die. Why I should have so felt, cannot now be explained by anything felt in my body. Nor could I explain it to myself then. I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well grounded. I felt " I was going to die," and at once set about thinking out what I should do. I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself, then and there.

" The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective, or ' introverted.' I said to myself mentally, *i.e.*,

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without uttering the words—'Now, death is come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid, as though *rigor-mortis* had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together so that no sound may escape. Let not the word 'I' or any other word be uttered! 'Well then,' said I to myself 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am "I" dead? Is the body "I"? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound "I" within myself,—apart from the body. So 'I' am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by Death. I am therefore the deathless spirit.' All this was not a mere intellectual process. All this flashed before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing in that state and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The 'I' or my 'self' was holding the focus of attention by a powerful fascination, from that time forwards. Fear of death had vanished at once and forever. Absorption in the self has continued from that moment right up to this time. Other thoughts may come and go like the various notes of a musician but the 'I' continues like the basic or fundamental *Sruti* note, which accompanies and blends with all other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centred on 'I.' Previous to that crisis, I had no clear perception of myself and was not

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consciously attracted to it. I had felt no direct perceptible interest in it—much less any permanent disposition to dwell upon it. The consequences of this new habit were soon noticed in my life.

" In the first place I lost any little interest I had in my outward relationship with friends, kinsmen, studies, etc. I went through my studies mechanically. I would take up a book and keep the page open before me to satisfy my elders that I was reading. As for my attention, that was far away, gone far indeed from such superficial matters as study. In my dealings with relatives, friends, etc., I developed humility, meekness, and indifference. Formerly when among other boys I was given some burdensome work, I would occasionally complain of unjust distribution of work. If boys chaffed me, I might retort and sometimes threaten them, and assert myself. If someone dared to poke fun at me or take other liberties, he would be made quickly to realise his mistake. Now all that was changed. All burdens imposed, all chaffing, and all fun were put up with meekly. The old personality that resented and asserted itself had disappeared. I stopped going out with friends for sports, etc., and preferred to be left to myself. Oftentimes I would sit alone by myself especially in posture suitable for meditation, close my eyes and lose myself in the all-absorbing concentration on myself, on the spirit, current or force (*Avesam*) which constituted myself. I would continue it despite the constant jeers of my elder brother who would mock me, address me by the titles *Jnani* (Sage), *Yogiswara* (Lord of Yogis) and advise me jocularly to go away to a dense primeval forest like the Rishis of yore. All preference and avoidance in the matter of food had gone. All food given to me, tasty or tasteless, good or rotten, I would swallow with indifference to its taste, smell or quality.

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"One of the new features related to the temple of Meenakshisundareswara. Formerly I would go there rarely, go with friends, see the images, put on sacred ashes and sacred vermillion on the forehead and return home without any perceptible emotion. After the awakening into the new life, I would go almost every evening to the temple. I would go alone and stand before Siva, or Minakshi or Nataraja or the sixty-three saints for long periods. I would feel waves of emotion overcoming me. The former hold (*Alambana*) on the body had been given up by my spirit, since it ceased to cherish the idea I-am-the-body (*Dehatma-buddhi*). The spirit therefore longed to have a fresh hold (*Alambana*) and hence the frequent visits to the temple and the overflow of the soul in profuse tears. This was God's (Iswara's) play with the individual spirit. I would stand before Iswara, the controller of the Universe and the destinies of all, the Omniscient and Omnipresent, and occasionally pray for the descent of his grace upon me so that my devotion might increase and become perpetual like that of the sixty-three saints. Mostly I would not pray at all, but let the deep within flow on and into, the Deep without. Tears would mark this overflow of the soul and not betoken any particular feeling of pleasure or pain. I was no pessimist. I knew nothing of life and had no idea that it was full of sorrow; and I had no desire to avoid rebirth or seek release, to obtain dispassion (*Vairagya*) or salvation. I had read no books other than Periapuranam, my bible lessons and bits of Tayumanavar or Tevaram. My notion of God (or Iswara as I called the Infinite but Personal Deity) was similar to that found in the Puranas. I had not heard then of * Brahman, †Samsara, &c. I had no idea then that

* "Brahman," is God Impersonal. the One Real underlying all phenomena.

† "Samsara", is the endless succession of births and deaths.

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there was an essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything, and that myself and Iswara were both identical with it. At Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to Ribhugita and other works, I picked up these facts and discovered that these books were analysing and naming what I had previously felt intuitively without analysis and name. In the language of the books, I should describe my mental or spiritual condition after the awakening, as *Suddha Manas* or *Vijnana ie.* the Intuition of the Illumined.

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CHAPTER VI

CROSSING THE RUBICON

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune,

Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

यदहरेव विरजेत्तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत्

'The moment you feel life's vanity, quit home.'

Venkataraman had now hurled himself forward along the line of his choice. "Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring" was now his motto. He seldom lost an opportunity to shove his books and social duties aside, and to sit up for his concentration on the self, *Atmadhyana*. The social result of such conduct is not hard to imagine. Neglected lessons and neglected social duties bring on reprimands and punishments. An element of discord gradually develops and gains force enough to upset the original equilibrium. All progress, nay all motion, is the result of such want of adjustment between interior development and the environment. Venkataraman's uncle and brother bitterly deplored that such a fine intellect as his should be lost in what they believed to be useless religiosity or idle sentimentality, and administered many a reprimand. The school-master also could not put up with persistent disregard of class lessons, and finding exhortation useless resorted to the infliction of impositions. For his part, Venkataraman was getting to feel the unsuitability of his Madura home for the life he was intent on. It no doubt gave him physical comforts for which he did not care but hindered the one thing for which he cared. All things pointed to the coming of a crisis.

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The crisis did arrive on Saturday the 29th August, 1896. He had failed to study English Grammar properly, and had been given an imposition—to copy a lesson from Bain's Grammar, three times. He sat upstairs for some time, and copied the lesson twice, and was writing the third copy. Suddenly his soul revolted against "the sad mechanic exercise." He bundled up Bain and his papers, cast them aside, and sat up bolt upright for his congenial meditation, with eyes closed. His brother was watching him all the while, and with intent to make him mend his ways, cried out, "இப்படியெல்லா மிருக்கிறவனுக்கு இதெல்லாமென்னத்துக்கு?" The words literally are, "Why should one, who behaves thus, retain all this?" His meaning was quite clear. Why should one, who preferred his unwordly meditation to his study and domestic and social duties, continue to stay in society, and profess to go on with a course of study? Such expressions had been used several times during the previous four or five weeks by the senior, and had not been taken serious notice of by the junior. This time, however, the shot went home. "Yes," thought young Venkataraman, "what my brother says is quite true. What business have I here any longer?" Immediately the thought of "Arunachala," that had given him a thrill in the previous November, came to the front, and took possession of his soul with a consuming desire to get away and be in "Arunachala." Is not Arunachala, the All-seeing, All-powerful and All-knowing, now calling him to come up? Yes, this is the call of Arunachala, he decided, the call of his Father in Heaven. He cast about for ways and means to get out to Arunachala. That must be done secretly; and it must not be within the power of his relations to trace him and drag him back into the old groove. Once gone to

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Arunachala, he must be there for ever like the saint Nanda who said:

"தில்லை வெளியிலே கலந்துகொண் டாலவர்
திரும்பியும் வருவாரோ?"

(i.e. If one goes to Chidambaram and enters the Divine Ether there, will he ever return ?) Venkataraman also felt that once he put his hand to the plough, once he got to the feet of Arunachala, there should be no turning back. Come what may, he would face all, strong in the strength of the Lord. So he got up from his seat of meditation and told his brother that he should go to school that day at twelve noon, to attend a special class on electricity. The latter, quite unaware that he was giving his junior just the financial help needed for his trip to Tiruvannamalai, said: "Well then, do not fail to take five rupees from the box below, and to pay my college-fees in the College near your school." Here was a fresh manifestation of help from the Unseen. He went down, bolted his meal, and received five rupees from his uncle's wife. He hastily turned over an antiquated atlas, that did not disclose the Villupuram-Tiruvannamalai-Katpadi branch line opened in 1892. According to that atlas, he noted that Tindivanam was the nearest point to Tiruvannamalai on the Madura-Egmore Railway line; and surmising that three rupees would suffice to carry him to Tindivanam, he left the balance of Rs. 2 in an easily discoverable corner, and a letter amidst his brother's books and left Madura for good.

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CHAPTER VII

A WORD IN PARTING

How is it that ye sought me ?
Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business ?

St. Luke II, 49.

The parting letter runs thus :—

என் தகப்பனாரைத் தேடிக்கொண்டு

நான் Λ அவருடைய உத்தரவின்படி இவ்விடத்தை விட்டுக் கிளம்பிவிட்டேன். இது நல்ல காரியத்தில்தான் பிரவேசித்திருக்கிறது. ஆகையால் இந்தக் காரியத்திற்கு ஒருவரும் விசனப்பட வேண்டாம். இதைப் பார்ப்பதற்காக பணமும் செலவு செய்யவேண்டாம்.

உன் சம்பளத்தை இன்னும் செலுத்தவில்லை. ரூ. 2 இதோடு கூட இருக்கிறது.

இப்படிக்கு,
— — — —

in search of my father and

"I have, Λ in obedience to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over this affair. To trace this out, no money need be spent.

Your College-fee has not yet been paid. Rupees two are enclosed herewith.

Thus,
— — — —

The letter throws clear light on the all-interesting question of Venkataraman's state of mind, when he left Madura for good, and the progress that had been made by him in ethical and spiritual fields. One would like to know whe-

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ther he left Madura, casting "a longing lingering look behind," as thoughts of hearth and home, kith and kin, and friends and former scenes of joyous or other emotions passed before his mind's eyes, and whether sympathetic sorrow welled up in his heart to think of the grief that would be caused to his mother and others in losing him. Had he also any fears or misgivings about the future, as he was going into the dark and unknown world, homeless, penniless and friendless?

Strange to say, none of these thoughts appear to have distressed him. A huge wave of frenzy seems to have swallowed up his entire being and left little room for thoughts like these. He was, however, too good-natured and too loving a soul, entirely to ignore the feelings of those dear to him. He wished to see them freed from all the worries of a search for him, and from the deep distress which would be caused by his absence—especially to his mother. He consoles their distress by a reference to the goodness of his enterprise, and bids them cheer up. He seems to say,

"Arunachal, from afar
Is calling. That's the call for me.
May there be no moaning at the bar,
When I put out to sea."

As to their fears about him and his future, he informs them that he would be in safe hands, as he is starting purely in obedience to the Father's command, in order to seek and find Him. He has further a desire to save the family needless expense (in addition to their worries) in trying to find his whereabouts. He also wishes to inform his brother that his college-fee remained unpaid, and that part of it (namely rupees two) has been left with the letter. All this is one side of the shield; the other side is spiritual.

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Here we note that the chief feature in Venkataraman's development is his powerful faith in *Iswara* (God, the Father), "Arunachala," who was calling him. The omission of this name must be the result of the conscious or unconscious perception that it would betray his distination. The next feature revealed by the letter may be regarded by some as its most important feature and perhaps as the only one worth mention. Even the most casual reader would note the use of the term இது "this," in the letter. The opening sentence blurts out an "I." The invidual consciousness is then to the fore, and clearly noticed by the reader. But in the very next sentence, the philosopher's stone touches and transmutes the baser metal (the individual Ego) before the reader's eyes into the gold of an Impersonal or expanded "I." The next phrase after "I" in the letter is என் தகப்பனார் (" My father. "). Here leaps the blest Ego on to Heaven, asserting a son's right to visit the father. The baseness of the Ego is immediately lost, and the survivor is the "Son of God." He is like his Father, a spirit, and not a "cunning cast of clay." The removal of *Dehatma buddhi* (the idea, "I am the body,") this disappearance of the earth-stain from the writer, furnishes the clue to the otherwise puzzling term இது "this," in the following sentences. Reference is made by the enlightened soul of the writer, in the second sentence, to the journey to Tiruvannamalai; and in describing himself, the third person neuter is employed. Not "I," but "this" is what launches on the enterprise. What leaves Madura for Tiruvannamalai now (i.e., from the second sentence onwards) is not the spirit, that is already getting absorbed in God, but the body, viewed clearly as distinct from the spirit. The identification of one's self with the body has snapped; and the broken ends (apart from each other) are

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clearly exposed to view. The next sentence refers to "this" business and not to my business. The fourth sentence also refers to the probable search by relations for the missing writer, in these terms: " இதைப்பார்ப்பதற்காக " "to trace this (person)." The letter seems here to chide the relations thus:—'Tush! you want to see "*this*" *body*, "this" inert matter! "What good will that do? You really wish to have commerce with the embodied spirit you knew under the name of Venkataraman. Behold! That spirit is gone. A new spirit, very hard to identify with the old narrow, body-bound one, has taken its place. Hence cease your quest." Then comes the letter to a close with a "Thus ————." Here, in place of the dashes, a signature would have been appended by Venkataraman of earlier years. But on this occasion, the personality which began with an "I" had melted into "this," in the succeeding lines; and at the close, there was evidently no person remaining at that time and at that place to sign the letter. The sense of personality had sunk, vanished, or at any rate got too much attenuated to warrant a signature or produce an inclination to sign the letter. The omission of a signature is clearly not due to lack of time, in the hurry to catch the train. There has been time to inscribe a series of dashes in lieu of the signature, and thereafter to add even a postscript, to inform the brother about his unpaid college-fee, and the balance of money left. Even these later lines are all impersonal. "Your college-fee has not been paid" says the postscript, but does not add, *by whom*. There is no such phrase as "*by me*" or "*by this*." And lastly about the two rupees left, reference is made to the inert silver lying with the letter. It is purely impersonal. How eloquent are these indications of the alteration in his personality!

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A great deal more has to be mentioned about the ethical or spiritual state of the subject of this sketch. In fact his biography has very little of "plot interest" or thread of facts on which his teachings and spiritual experiences are to be strung. Let us therefore have this plain dish of facts, first, before we proceed to the rich dainties of his spiritual life.

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CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT FROM HOME IN QUEST OF HIS FATHER

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

The pilgrim had left home, determined never to set foot there again. The cuckoo leaves the crow's nest where it was hatched, when it discovers its true nature, and never returns.

It was about twelve noon on Saturday, when Venkataraman left home. The station was a mile off and he walked fast. Twelve noon was the usual time for the departure of the train to Tindivanam and Madras. But when he reached the station, he found that, though he was very late, the train was still later. It had not yet arrived. Here was yet another proof that Providence (his Father) smiled on the enterprise. He looked up the fare to Tindivanam in the suspended tables at the station and found it to be Rupees two and annas thirteen. He was too much preoccupied with his thoughts to look a few lines below and see that Tiruvannamalai itself was a railway station, and that the fare to it was just three rupees. Not only was he shy and unaccustomed to ask people for information, but he was also swayed by a consideration of the secrecy needed for the success of his enterprise. Above all, he was quite indifferent to the business skill which carefully settles the details of a tour programme so as to avoid needless

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trouble and expense. His soul was soaring on the other hand "about empyreal heights of thought," and kept company with the Lord. So he straightway bought a ticket to Tindivanam; and tying up the balance of annas three into a knot in a corner of his cloth, he got into a carriage as soon as the train arrived, and lost himself in his thoughts. He had no burden, physical or mental, to be anxious about. A man that thinks of various external things loses his soul, which gets swallowed up in thoughts of these objective possessions. For, where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Venkataraman's fellow passengers had their luggage, and had to keep a sharp look-out and should "beware of railway thieves" as the placards warned them to do. His treasures were laid up (if at all) "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal." He was absorbed in thoughts of his Father and in repeatedly plunging within his own soul. It is of such that God (Sri Krishna) says in the Bhagavad Gita, (IX, 22),

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तोमां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

"I look after the interests and safety of those who are perpetually engaged in My service and whose thoughts are always about Me and Me alone."

Venkataraman had all the security and happiness which the absence of any sense of possession and the presence of God in the soul could give. Without noticing what his fellow passengers were saying or doing, and unmindful of the varied and beautiful landscape that was exposed to view as the train sped northwards he sank into himself and was silent. Several stations had thus been passed. In his carriage an old Moulavi* with a silvery

* "Moulavi" means Mahomedan well-versed in religious lore.

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beard was discoursing with other passengers on the life and teachings of many a saint. The Moulavi noticed the Brahmin youth seated by himself and not partaking in their discussion, and asked him :

"Whither are you going, Swami ?"

"To Tiruvanamalai," was the laconic reply.

"I am also going there," said the Moulavi.

"What ? To Tiruvannamalai ?" queried the youth.

"No, I am going to the next station."

"What is the next station ?" again asked the youth.

"Tirukoilur" was the Moulavi's reply.

"What ! Does the train go to Tiruvannamalai ?" asked the innocent youth in surprise.

"A strange passenger you are to be sure. Then to what place did you buy your ticket ?"

"To Tindivanam."

"O dear, you need not go to Tindivanam at all. We must alight at Villupuram Junction and change train for Tiruvannamalai and Tirukoilur."

After picking up this piece of information Venkataraman again sank back into himself, caring no more what became of his fellow passengers or aught else in the world. The excitement of his journey and his deep mental absorption kept off even the sensation of hunger. It was only when the train reached Trichinopoly Junction at sunset, that he felt its pinch. He purchased two country pears and ate one of them. Hardly had he swallowed a morsel of the fruit, straightway his hunger disappeared, and he had a sense of fullness in the stomach, a disinclination to eat anything more. This was a surprise to him. Till the previous day he was eating his two full meals a day, besides cold rice in the morning, and tiffin (i. e., lunch) in the afternoon, without any difficulty; yet now a single morsel filled his

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stomach and he could not eat more! As for sleep, he hardly knew the difference between sleep and the *Samadhi* state in which he was sunk all along. At 3 a. m. he reached Villupuram and alighted there. In the morning, he walked up and down the streets of Villupuram to discover which road to take. He was too shy to ask any one. He found on the finger-posts names like "Mambalapattu," but not the name Tiruvannamalai. He did not know then that Mambalapattu was on the way to Tiruvannamalai. This brisk morning-walk made him hungry, and he went up to a hotel for food. The proprietor asked him to wait till noon for his meal. Venkataraman sat there and as usual lost himself in *Samadhi*. The hotel-keeper must have watched with interest this young Brahmin lad with a fair complexion, long jet-black locks, golden ear-rings, and a face beaming with intelligence, rapt in *Samadhi*, and having no luggage or possessions. When after meal, annas two were offered by the youth, the proprietor asked him:

"How much have you?"

"Only annas two and a half," replied Venkataraman.

"Keep it yourself," said the proprietor.

Venkataraman started at once for the railway station where he purchased a ticket to Mambalapattu, *i.e.*, as far as the funds in hand permitted. He reached that station the same evening, and resolved to walk the remaining distance to Tiruvannamalai. So he walked on about ten miles, and then saw a hill and a temple—the temple of Arayani-Nallur. He was totally unaccustomed to have such a long walk, especially under a hot sun. He felt quite wearied and it was late in the evening when he reached the temple. There was none there. So he waited outside the front tower, and after some time, when the door of the temple was opened, he entered in and took his seat in a pillared hall (a *manta-*

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pam), which was the only portion in that dark temple that was not altogether dark, and fell into meditation. Here as he sat, he had a "visual automatism" or "photism"*—a vision of dazzling light suddenly streaming forth and pervading all the place. He started from his seat, thinking "this must be the appearance of the God here," and went into the inner sanctuary (*Garba-Griha*) to see if the light emanated from there. But finding no such light in that room, he was convinced that the light he saw did not come from the image. Whatever the light was, it had disappeared at once, and he "plunged in thought again." This *samadhi* was broken only by the cook shouting out when the puja was over, "Who is there in the hall? Come out. I must lock the temple." Venkataraman came out and asked for some food. "There is no food for you here" was the curt reply. "Let me at least stay here" was the youth's request. "Oh no," said the priest, "None is allowed to stay here."

Venkataraman then came out and accompanied the others to Kilur, a distance of six furlongs, as he was told that perhaps there, after the night's puja was over, he might get food. When the party entered the Kilur temple of Viratteswara and the priest went on with his worship, Vekataraman was again deep in *Samadhi*, from which he was roused by the priest at the time of his departure. The youth asked for food and received again the priest's curt negative reply. The temple drummer who had all along been present and observed the pious and saintly lad's plight, cried out: "Why, sir, give him my share." With this plate of boiled rice, Venkataraman was led to a Sastri's house in the neighbourhood at about 9 p. m. to get some water. But even as

* See page 258. W. James' Varieties of Religious Experience.

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he waited for the water, he fell asleep; and he seems to have walked on during that sleep and fallen down on account of his hunger and weariness. Some time later he woke up to find himself lying down some distance from where he originally stood. There was a crowd around him, wondering at the strange but handsome lad who had asked for water, fallen down, luckily without injury, and lost consciousness. He then picked up the rice which he found scattered on the floor, ate a portion of it, and slept there.

Next morning was Monday the 31st of August, 1896, *Gokulashtami*, the birth-day of Sri Krishna. He had still twenty miles to reach Tiruvannamalai; walking up and down, he could not discover which road or path he was to take. He felt fatigued and hungry. So he must first find food, and then must go by train; "and for the trainfare... ....." he mused awhile, and pulled off his ear-rings set with rubies. These, worth about twenty rupees, must be pledged. "How and to whom?" He had no experience of pledging and borrowing. Necessity is however the mother of invention. Hunger was asserting itself. So he walked on to the house of one Muthukrishna Bhagavatar and begged for food. He was referred to a dame in the house. The good lady rejoiced to see the youth arrive as a guest on this sacred day of Sri Krishna's birth; and she gave him a copious cold meal, and insisted on his eating the whole of it, despite his feeling satiated after the very first mouthful. Then he went to the Bhagavatar and to avoid rousing undue suspicion, professed to have travelled with his luggage which somehow got lost on the way and to be reduced thus to the necessity of pledging his ear-rings to get funds, Rs. 4-0-0, to continue his pilgrimage. The Bhagavatar took the ear-rings and finding them real gold and real rubies, advanced him the four rupees, after getting his address

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noted on a slip and giving him a slip with his own address.

The Bhagavatar and the dame, fully believing the scriptural declaration that all guests are God (Vasudeva) Himself gave the youth not merely a full meal at noon, but also a packet of sweetmeats prepared for Sri Krishna, even before they were duly offered as *Naivedya* (*i.e.*, food offering) at the formal puja, and sent him off to the railway station. Venkataraman promised to come back and redeem the jewels. But as soon as he left the house, he tore the address slip to pieces. He scorned the idea of reclaiming the jewels, whatever their value might be. With the sweetmeats and the money, he marched to the station where he slept; on the morning of the 1st September, 1896, he got a ticket for four annas and reached Tiruvannamalai in an hour.

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CHAPTER IX

AT THE FATHER'S FEET

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee,
Now, rest my long divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful centre rest,
Nor ever from thy Lord depart,
With Him of every good possessed.

Sankey's Songs and Solos.

Alighting at Tiruvannamalai station on the morning of 1st September, 1896, Venkataraman beheld his "promised land" in the " starry-pointing" towers of Arunachaleswara's Temple from afar. As with the Saint Nanda, the very sight of the towers filled his soul with joy, arising not merely from the sense of achievement but also from the close proximity to Bliss itself. With quick steps and a bounding heart, he proceeded straight to the great Temple. The gates of the three high compound walls and all the inner doors were open. There was not a soul beside him there ; and it looked as though the Father was thus preparing to welcome his " beloved son," who marched straight to the inmost shrine, the Holy of Holies, without any hindrance and addressed Arunachaleswara (in the shape of a Lingam) thus :

O, God, obedient to Thy call,
Here have I come, deserting all.

That moment, all physical and mental excitement disappeared ; he felt a soothing sensation ; and his cup of bliss was full to the brim.

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" Tis done, the great transaction's done.
I am the Lord's, and He is mine ;
He drew me and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine."—(*Sankey*)

That was the supreme moment of his life, the point at which the old and false worldly life may be said to be "rung out", and the new and true life in the Father and the Self " rung in." He stood a while there in ecstasy, and left the sanctuary. He had sealed his future and delivered it over to God ; and henceforward he was but a baby in the arms of his Father, to be tossed about, or played with, as He chose.

" Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture burst on his sight.
Perfect submission, all is at rest.
He rests in the Lord, e'er happy and blest."—(*Ibid*)

Now that he had seen the stone Lingam, he felt that it was, not any mere external physical object, but the Omnipresent, All-pervading Spirit, that had drawn him and was still drawing him away from his old groove. Three years passed, before he again went in to see Arunachala at the temple. Constant visits to the shrine, he felt, were needless in the face of the constant presence that filled his heart, of the hourly protection that he received, and of the strengthening realization that he was the immortal spirit.

The lives of saints constantly pass from the personal to the impersonal, and *vice versa* ; moments of passive characterless consciousness alternate with deep devotion to a Personal God. The youth felt this truth and other aspects of truth in a hazy undefined way, for till then he had no book-learning, nor a teacher to analyse for him all he felt, to show him for instance that the finite proves, on analysis, to be the infinite; the Personal, to be the Im-

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personal; the many with forms and attributes, to be the Absolute Real.

When Venkataraman (or the young Swami as we may henceforth call him) left his Father's presence, where did he go?

"The world was all before *him* where to choose
His place of rest; and Providence his guide."

His choice was of course Tiruvannamalai, and in it, his Father's immediate presence, that is, the premises of the great temple. According to Scripture (*Sastras*), the proper residence for an anchorite (*Parivrajaka*) is a temple, a hill, a cave, the foot of a tree or the banks of holy waters; and the young Swami found the temple (as many others before, and after him, found) to be the most convenient. The very atmosphere there is pure and laden with spiritual power. The constant peals of the temple bells, the frequent streams of pious visitors approaching their God, with *Tevaram*, *Tiruppugazh* and other hymns, the processions of the sacred images followed by a band of youths chanting aloud the sacred Vedas with the very accent and intonation which the *rishis*, the seers of the forest, employed thousands of years ago, and many other phases of religious life that one constantly meets with in these precincts, fully justified the selection so far as impulses to virtue and piety were concerned. If however one wished to get away even from external contacts and to commune in solitude with himself or his God, even then the precincts were particularly suited to his needs. There were the flower garden, the plantain garden, the higher chambers of the numerous towers especially the skyscraping eastern one* of thirteen

* The eastern tower is 2161 feet high; the length of the temple is 1480 feet and its breadth 680 feet.

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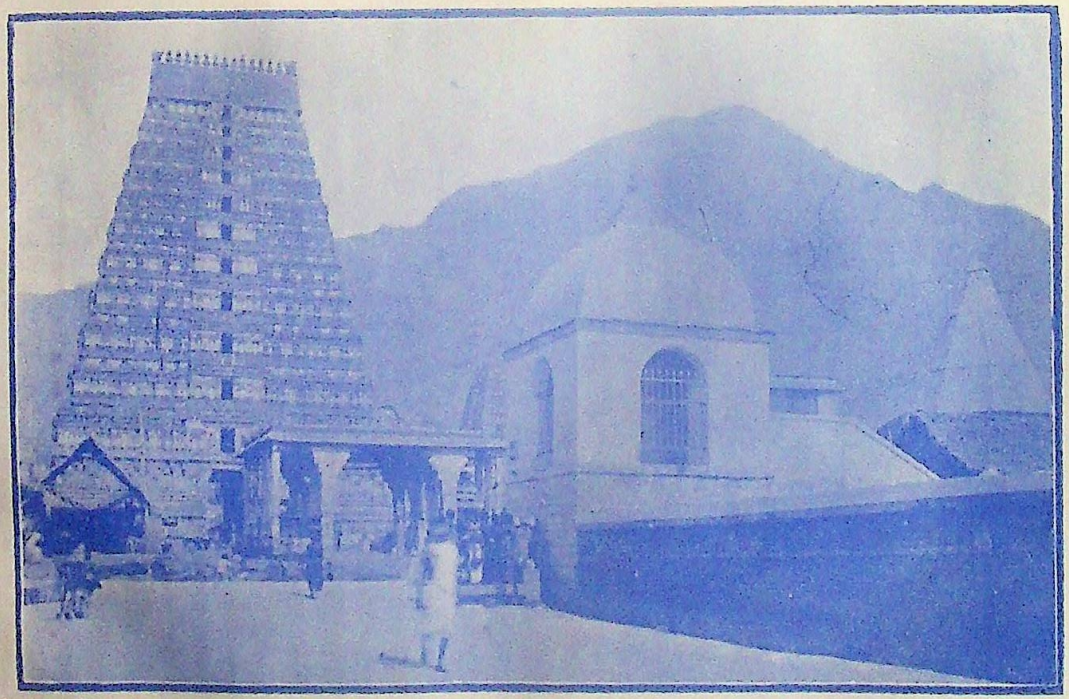

Arunachala Hill and Temple

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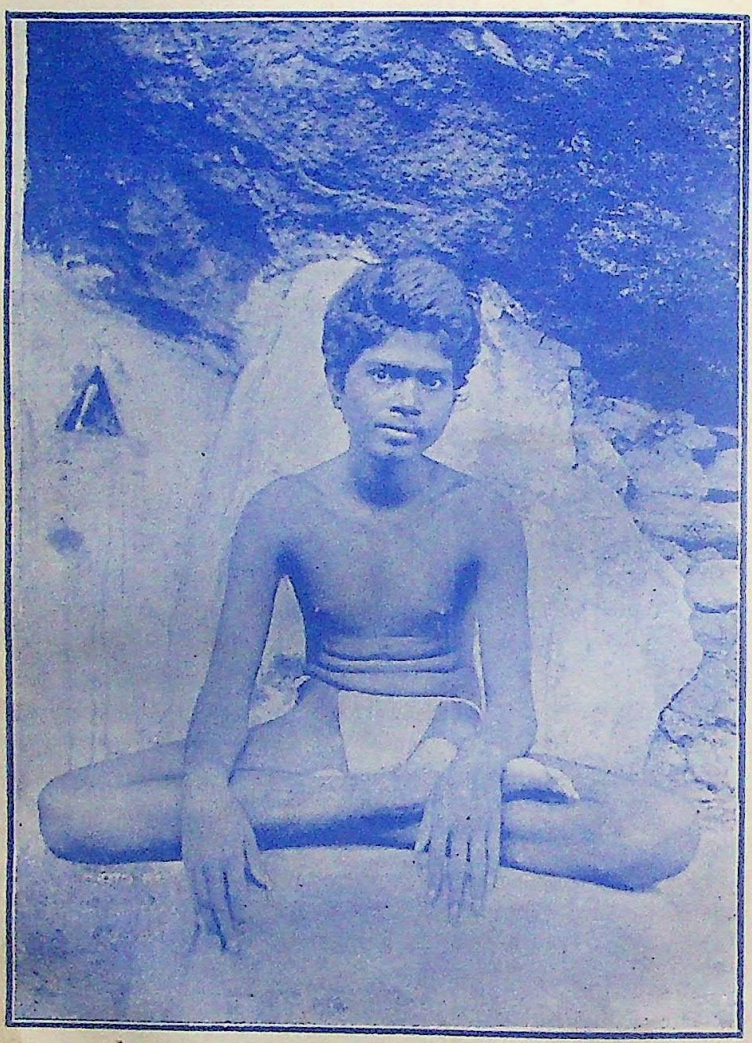

Young Brahmanaswami

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storeys, and many a nook and corner of this vast temple measuring over two furlongs in length and one in breadth and the numerous minor shrines therein ; all these provide adequate solitude. The ascetic has no need for secrecy and he has nothing to keep or lock up. Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the son of God hath no place which he calls his own. Every place is his ; the earth's surface everywhere is a bed for him ; the trees are his umbrellas, the moon his lantern ; and all the folk he meets are his brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers providing him with food. Was the young Swami ever troubled by the thought—where he was to get a meal ? Never ; never has he troubled himself to think what he should drink, what he should eat, and wherewithal he should be clothed. His Father knows his need of these things ; and he thinks only of his Father and his self (which is the kingdom of God) and all these are added unto him. The thousand- pillared hall served as the first residence for the young "Brahmana Swami,"—that is the name by which he has always been known to the masses at Tiruvannamalai. He sat there during his period of *samadhi* without so much as a cloth, much less a mat, a rug, or shawl to spread on the cold slabs ; his arm was his pillow ; his palm was his plate ; and any rag found by the way side was his dress.*

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*(१) सत्यां क्षितौ किं कशिपोः प्रयासैर्बाहौ
स्वसिद्धे ह्युपबर्हणैः किम् ।
सत्यंजलौ किं पुरुधान्नपात्रैर्दिग्वल्कलादौ सति किं दुकूलैः ॥
(२) चीराणि किं पथिनसन्ति दिशन्ति भिक्षां नैवाङ्घ्रिपाः परभृतस्सरितो प्यशुष्यन् ।

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On the very day of his arrival, he had aimlessly walked on to the Ayyankulam Tank and thrown away the bundle of sweet-meat given to him at the Kilur Bhagavatar's house saying to himself, "To this block (*i.e.*, the body) why give any sweetmeat?" As he walked back from the tank, and came near the temple, some one accosted him and asked, "You want your tuft of hair to be removed, eh?" "Yes," replied the young Swami who was immediately taken to a barber and had the entire hair on his head removed.

As a boy at Dindigul and Madura, he was noted for the beauty of his locks, (fine long jet-black locks), a fair complexion, and a handsome face; and now at one stroke he parted with his locks without a sigh. A clean-shaven head was the token of asceticism (Sanyasa) *i.e.*, of his parting with all the vanities of the world, and entering upon a solemn course of life in which, things far higher, far more serious, should occupy every minute of his attention. He then tore his cloth to shreds, and wearing one of them as a cod-piece *(Koupina)* cast away the rest and all his money, *i.e.*, three rupees and a half. He also removed the sacred thread from his body and threw it away. He was not go-

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रुद्धा गुहाः किमवधूतसुहृन्न कृष्णः कस्माद्भजन्ति कवयो धनदुर्मदान्धान् ॥

* (1) When there is the earth to lie upon, why trouble about a bed? When one's arm is readily available, why require pillows? When there is the palm of one's hand, why seek for plates and utensils? When there is the atmosphere or a bark or other similar stuff to clothe oneself in, what need is there of silks?

(2) Are there no rags by the way side? Do not trees yield their gifts? Have streams, that always support others, dried up? Is not God (Sri Krishna) the friend of those who have surrendered everything? Why then do the Wise wait upon the rich, who are blinded by and intoxicated with their wealth?

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA II. 2.

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ing to touch, and never after did he touch, money. These vows of austerity, of "holy poverty," were essential details of the good path he had chosen, and they served to set off and support his high *tapas*. The wearing of the cod-piece was not merely for decency; it typified, and served as a reminder of, the internal fastening of the will, the vow of celibacy, of purity in thought, word and deed, the sublime vow, not even to *think* of sex; for, as the great reformer and spiritualiser of Judaism showed, lust in the heart is quite as ruinous to one's spiritual flights as any lust in speech or act.

The casting away of the sacred thread had its solemn significance. The young Swami was realising his own nature, and discarding all that was not the self. The body was not himself; he had effectively discarded it by realising himself as the current or energy (*Avesam*); and when the body was thus discarded, with it must go all distinctions and ideas based upon the notion that body was the self. A boy, if asked suddenly "Who are you?," says "I am a Brahmin, I am a Hindu, I am the son of Ramaswami Iyer, I am a sixth form student, etc." His real self never occurs to him. The young Swami, who was determined to live in the Real, wished to cast away even the last vestiges of distinctions based on the body. The sacred thread reminded one of his claim to Brahmin descent, Brahmin breeding, and to the superiority connected therewith. He was getting farther and farther away from such distinctions. He was inferior to none, superior to none. The sacred thread had done its duty so far; it had no further function for him to fulfil; and it was therefore cast away. "Love of wealth is the root of all evil;" so the Swami threw away what wealth he had in the shape of coins and clothes. He who feeds the raven and the sparrow, He who clothes the lilies of the field, was feeding and clothing him. Instinctively, that is, with-

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out any internal struggle or progressive effort the young Swami reached these truths and denuded himself of everything that he could get rid of. After his shave he did not bathe, but addressed his body thus (mentally)—"Should this block be accorded the comforts of a bath?" and passed on to the temple.

The few weeks of his stay at this mantapam were not all rosy and pleasant. One may feel quite sure that the young Swami would have at least his share of thorns and pin-pricks to endure. A young man of seventeen, without any kinsmen or supporters, moving up and down, observing a rule of silence, provoked first the curiosity and next the mischievous tendency of those about him, especially of the youth. They had seen already for four or five years, one Seshadri (later known as the famous Seshadriswami) walking up and down the streets of Tiruvannamalai, had called him a crazy fellow, and treated him as though he were mad. The new arrival, they thought, was a bird of the same feather and accordingly called him "Chinna Seshadri" (*i.e.*, Seshadri the Younger) and paid him the compliment of flinging a few stones at him, as he sat in meditation. One day when the young Swami sat on the central dais of that mantapam and plunged in meditation, he found stones whizzing from behind him, and in front of him. Luckily they did not touch his body. So he moved to the dark recess of a large pit (known as Patala Lingam) in that same hall, where he hoped to be free from such attentions. The change however seems to have been from the frying pan into the fire. That dark pit despite the sacred images in it, was never lit, never swept and never cleaned. It was mostly damp and insect pests flourished luxuriantly there. As the young *Mouni** sat there, enjoying the bliss of his soul, nettles,

* The silent one.

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wasps, bees, ants, mosquitoes, and other vermin, the rightful occupants of the pit, attached themselves to the intruder's body and rejoiced in drinking his blood. The nether side of his thighs and legs as he sat there, were full of sores from which blood and pus issued. Even when one Ratnammal went into this dark pit to give him food, pointed out these disadvantages and invited him to her house, the Swami gave no response by act, word or even gesture; and when she left a newly washed cloth, requesting him to use it as a bed or a seat at least, to ward off the attack of these pests, he never cared even to touch it. Such was the intensity of his trance that he never noticed the pests. As for the kind attentions of mischievous youths, the Swami did not entirely escape them. Afraid of the darkness, they stood afar and hurled broken pots, which approached the pit and were shattered to pieces with a loud crash. Even the throwing of stones did not cease. Seshadri Swami appears to have mounted guard over this young Swami at times. But unfortunately, his presence, on some occasions at any rate, increased the risk and not the comforts, of the ward. One Venkatachala Mudali thus describes such an occasion which led to a change in the Swami's residence. One noon, going near the thousand-pillared hall, Mudali found a group of boys, mostly Moslem boys, hurling stones in the direction of the pit. Enraged at the sight, he ran, seized a twig, and was at the young scamps who fled away promptly. Suddenly from the dark recesses of the hall there issued forth the figure of Seshadri. Mudali was taken aback, but soon recovering himself, enquired of the Swami if the stones pelted by the boys had hurt him. "Oh, no," replied the Swami, "but go and see the Chinnaswami there," pointed towards the pit, and went away. Proceeding further inside, Mudali could make out nothing for awhile, as he was coming from

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the glare into the darkness. In a few minutes, the faint outlines of a young face were discernible in that pit. Some what frightened, he went out to the adjoining flower-garden where a sadhu was working with his disciples. Mentioning the facts to them, he took some of them with him. Even then the youthful figure sat motionless and with closed eyes, despite the noise of the footsteps of this group. Then they lifted the Swami from the pit, carried him away from the hall up a flight of steps and deposited him in front of a shrine of Subrahmanya. The Swami still remained unconscious; his eyes still remained closed; evidently he was in deep *Samadhi*. They noted the large number of sores caused by ants and fleas on the nether side of the Swami's thighs and legs, with blood and pus flowing from some of them, and wondered how any one could remain unconscious of his body amidst such torture. Regarding it as irreverence, nay impertinence, to make any further noise in such presence, they bowed and went away.

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CHAPTER X

YEARS OF STRENUOUS LIFE

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight:
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Ladder of St. Augustine. Longfellow.

'Brahmana Swami' himself a *mouni* (*i.e.*, one maintaining silence) was looked after* by the 'Mouna Swami,' who lived in the shrine of Subrahmanya and by a group of mendicant *sadhus* who lived in the adjoining garden. Some others also occassionally assumed care of him. But not one of these was attached to him permanently. 'Mouna Swami' used to give him the milk which was washed out from the Goddess Uma's shrine. This was a curious mixture of milk, water, turmeric powder, sugar, plantains, raw or ripe, and sundry other articles; and the passionless Brahmana Swami would gulp it down without any revulsion.

The temple priest, who noticed it one day, was greatly pained, and ordered that the pure milk used for the Goddess and immediately collected without any admixture, should

* That Brahmana Swami needed looking after would appear sufficiently clear from Venkatachala Mudali's account given in the previous chapter. A further proof of it may be cited here. The Swami was so rapt in his moods and would sit absorbed for so many hours (even eight or ten hours) at a stretch, without rising for a meal that food had sometimes to be thrust into his mouth and for about a month at the end of 1896, he was totally without any drapery—not wearing even his usual cod-piece.

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thence forward be sent daily through the Mouna Swami in order that he may give part of it to 'Brahmana Swami.' After a short stay of one or two months in the above shrine the Swami took up his residence in the adjoining flower garden. Here, under the oleander (*Alari*) plants, several of them ten or twelve feet high, he would sit absorbed in deep *samadhi*, and sometimes discover at the end of it, that he was under a totally different plant many yards off from where he first sat. He next removed himself to the hall wherein the vehicles of the sacred images are kept. Here the sport of the mischievous lads compelled him to retreat far into the interior, and he would seat himself between the legs of a vehicle in the deep darkness, and lose himself in *samadhi*. Sometimes he would wake up to find his body underneath another vehicle somehow having crossed many obstacles, without injury. From this hall he moved on to the foot of a bel tree, then to the foot of an *iluppai* tree, and, finally to the *Mangai Pillayar* temple. The *iluppai* tree was quite close to a regular road within the first enclosure, the road intended for processions within the temple. The Swami had already attracted the attention of the pilgrims and of the local public in the Kartikai season, November-December, 1896; and hence crowds were constantly flocking to see him. It was here that the first "disciple"* or permanent attendant on the Swami, Uddandi Nayinar came to him. This Nayinar was a pious scholar who had read sacred books and books of philosophy, but found no peace of mind therein, and attained no realisation.

* The term 'disciple' should not be understood to imply a formal initiation ('*Diksha*'). Brahmana Swami 'appears never to have formally given '*Diksha*' or initiation to any one, or undertaken the position of a 'Guru'. But in fact he instructed many people who went to him; and these claim to be his "disciples," The Swami himself had no Guru, and no *Diksha* or initiation.

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He chanced to see the young Swami at the foot of the *iluppai* tree, rapt in ecstasy, and evidently oblivious of his body. "Here indeed," said Nayinar to himself, "are realisation and peace, and here must I seek them." Thenceforward, he was constantly at the Swami's side, looking after his bodily needs reciting *Vasishtham* and *Kaivalya Navanitam** and waiting with eager expectation to hear from his lips some blessed words of Upadesa (instruction) which might transform his learning into realisation and give him the peace supreme.

Nayinar's presence kept off idle crowds and minimised the disturbance to *samadhi*. But he could not remain with the Swami always. During the long spells of Nayinar's absence, not only was there frequent disturbance by the curious, but the pest of frolicsome youths also revived its attack. There was no dark pit here to hide in; and many of them still considered Swami a crazy youth who was lawful game for all their mirth and play. The liberties they took may be illustrated by citing one instance. One day as he sat in *samadhi* at the foot of the *illuppai* tree, forgetful of his body, some mischievous imp took the opportunity, when no one was in sight, of approaching him from behind and testing the intensity of his absorption. Liquid filth descended on the back of the Swami, thereby wetting his rags, and the lad must have tittered away wondering at his own cleverness. This young Swami was quite unaware of what had happened. Some time later, his consciousness revived, by reason of his wet rags, perhaps; and he wondered why these should be wet. Then from the smell he gathered the prank that some little fellow had played upon him, though no boy was standing near, at the time. No anger was raised in his breast at such treatment.

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* Standard Tamil works expounding Adwaita philosophy.

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"For a man's own angry pride
Is cap and bells for a fool."

Perhaps also, having played such a prank during his infancy, he thought, "Thus, the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." Any how, this *iluppai* tree was a place of much disturbance.

At about this time, one Annamalai Tambiran came along with Uddandi Nayinar and was paying constant and reverent attention to this Swami. By pure austerity and singing of *Tevaram** with crowds of followers, he collected alms, fed the poor, and maintained the worship of his Adheena Guru in a building which was therefore known as *Gurumurtam* in a suburb of Tiruvannamalai. Happening once to pass near the *iluppai* tree, he was deeply impressed with the purity of heart and the ecstatic state of the young Swami and thereafter constantly accompanied Nayinar to see him. One day he told the Swami that his Guru's shrine was away from the village, quite a retired spot where the Swami could carry on his meditation undisturbed by people and requested him to go there. The Swami agreed, and took up his residence at the shrine. The Tambiran daily recited there hundreds of *Tevaram* hymns, which were elevating and instructive, and which might even be a sufficient outfit for one's spiritual culture.

As the Swami's *Vairagya* (non-attachment) matured, and as he continued to neglect his comforts and even cleanliness, he rose in popular esteem. His body was besmeared with unwashed dirt, his hair became one clotted mass, and his finger-nails grew so long and curly that his hands were not useful for any purpose. He sat for some weeks on a floor which was always infested by ants, and

* Tevaram is the name given to the sacred songs of the three Tamil poet-saints, Appar, Sundaramurti and Sambandar.

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despite their constant crawling and biting, he sat for hours with eyes closed, leaning against the wall in *Samadhi*, and left on it the imprint of his back. The visitors could not endure for a few minutes the ant trouble which he was enduring for hours, days and weeks, losing his body consciousness. The Swami was therefore provided after some time with a stool in a corner, the feet of the stool being placed in water. But even then the Swami leaning on the wall gave the ants their chance and left another wax impress on the wall which is even now faintly discernible. People swarmed to see this height of self-neglect ; some said "This Swami must be very old," and pointed to the length of his nails as proof. Many people at once jumped to the conclusion that, being so saintly, he could grant them all the boons they desired, such as wealth, health, issue, and salvation, and poured praises into his ears and offerings at his feet. All this developed the Swami's humility, patience, endurance, and self-repression, आत्मविनिग्रह, though to some extent they proved disturbances to his meditation, which however were minimised by a bamboo palisade around him. His fame steadily increased as days passed ; and this meant increased disturbance and increased self-restraint, though the question of food-supply (if it ever was a question) was completely solved. For the first month or two at Gurumurtam, the Tambiran supplied *Naivedya i.e.*, food offered at the shrine of his Guru. The Tambiran then left, telling Nayinar to look after the Swami, and promised to return in a week. But in fact, he did not return till after a year. Nayinar also was called away to his *mutt* (religious foundation) in a few weeks after Tambiran left. So no one was left to look after the Swami. But with the increasing fame of the Swami, there was no difficulty in respect of food-supply. Many came with their occasional food-offer-

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ings, and a few undertook a regular supply of the daily food and each insisted that he or she should have the merit of feeding this ascetic. The only difficulty was to keep the rush away from the Swami; and after Nayinar left, there was no permanent attendant to perform that function. In a few months, even this was solved.

There was a Malayali by name Palaniswamy carrying on the worship of God Vinayaka in the town, and living upon the *Naivedya* (food offered to the God) as his solitary meal for the day, not even using salt for seasoning his food. One Srinivasa Iyer, seeing him at this devotion to the image, advised him to drop or alter his course. "What use," said Iyer, " is there in spending your lifetime with this stone Swami ? There is a young Swami in flesh and blood at Gurumurtam. He is steeped in austerities (*Tapas*) like the youthful Dhruva mentioned in the Puranas. If you go and serve him, and adhere to him, your life would serve its purpose." Others also pointed out to him that the Swami had no attendant, and that it was a blessing to serve such a rapt soul. Spurred on by such encomia, Palaniswamy went to Gurumurtam, saw the Swami and at once realised that he had discovered his Saviour. At first, Palaniswamy continued his worship at the Vinayakar temple, but in a short while, his faith in the living Guru increased and became all-absorbing ; and he discontinued his worship at the temple. Thus the old order changed, yielding place to new ; and God (Vinayaka) fulfilled* himself by sending the devotee on to Brahmana Swami, who thenceforward was his all in all, his only raft

* It is hardly necessary to assure the readers that no disrespect towards or attack against worship of idols is intended by the above recital or a similar recital in Chapter XIV. See also for Maharshi's views on the subject, *infra*.

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to cross this ocean of troubles, and his anchor for the remaining term, (nearly twenty-one years) of his life. Palaniswamy attended constantly on the Swami, in fact followed him like a shadow, received the bits of food-offerings supplied, mixed them up and offered them, (a cupful at noon) to the Swami as his mid-day meal, and returned the rest of the offerings to those who brought them, as *Bhuktasesha* or *Prasada*, that is, the blessing of the Swami.

One or two incidents of the Swami's life at Gurumurtam may be set down here, as indicative of his attitude towards others and their attitude towards him.

The Tambiran was getting over-zealous in his attention ; and one day he was arranging to get oil, sandal paste, etc., and making great preparation for treating the young Swami, exactly as the sacred idol in all temples is treated. He proposed, in fact, to pour over the Swami's devoted head oil, water, milk, food, etc. The young Swami did not relish the proposed treatment. So the next day before the Tambiran arrived with food, the young Swami had written with a piece of charcoal upon the adjoining wall, the following Tamil words " இதற்குத் தொண்டு இதுவே," which means, " This (food) alone is the service (needed) for this (body)." When the Tambiran came and placed the food before him, the Swami pointed to the writing on the wall, and thus made him understand that the ostentatious worship proposed by him was unacceptable. Incidentally, the revelation was first made to the Tiruvannamalai public that this ' Brahmana Swami' or ' Gurumurtam Swami ' was a person with education who could write Tamil—even good Tamil. This discovery led to the early disclosure of his identity. Amongst the sincere admirers that constantly visited him was a Taluk Head Accountant, Venkatarama

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Iyer. When he found that the Swami could write, the idea seized this elderly gentleman, that he must learn the identity of the Swami, that is, his name and the place he hailed from. In the presence of Tambiran and others he put the question to the Swami, who however remained silent, despite repeated questions. Iyer, with the persistence of Delilah and Vivien, declared that he would not move from there till he should learn those facts, even if his prolonged stay there should involve official trouble due to his absence at the Taluq Office, and intensity of hunger by keeping away from home. Moved by the ardour of this aged admirer's zeal, the Swami then wrote down his name and village as "Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi." The officer wondered what "Tiruchuzhi" was, being unacquainted with any such place. The Swami then picked up a copy of Periapuranam lying by his side, and showed him the name 'Tiruchuzhi,' as that of a village honoured by the classic song of Sundaramurti Swami.

There were tamarind trees in the garden surrounding Gurumurtam and those in charge of it had gone away somewhere one day. A gang of thieves came in and wanted to collect and carry off the tamarind produce. Noticing the silent Swami at the foot of the tamarind tree without any attendant, one thief said to another, "I say, bring some கள்ளிப்பால், (*i.e.*, the corrosive milk juice of euphorbia tirucalli); let us throw it into this man's eyes; and let us see if he will speak or not." The Swami who maintained his *Mounam* (rule of silence), neither spoke nor moved; he showed no concern as to what might happen to his body, or to the tamarind fruit. So, another broke out and said "Oh, don't mind him, what does he do unto us? Let us get along." So, without molesting him, they carried off the plunder. Alike at the time of the plunder, as at the time

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of the threat, the Brahmana Swami merely looked on unconcerned, and as Tennyson puts it,

....." let the world have its way :

For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal.

The May fly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike,

And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey."

... ...

For the maker's drift is dark, an Isis hid by a veil.

Who knows the ways of the world, how God will bring them about ?

... ...

I have not made the world, and he that made it will guide."

The Swami's daily routine of life, during the year and a half that he stayed at Gurumurtam, was to be in rapt *samadhi*, to get disturbed by the noice of visitors, and by the dinner cup—a sort of *Olla podrida*. This was his only meal and sufficed just to keep both body and soul together ; no wonder, the former grew thin and looked like a skeleton. He had no exercise and was constipated ; and sometimes days passed before a slight relief was afforded to the distended bowels. He would sit on the bench, mostly dazed, not knowing and not caring if it was morning or evening, one day or another of the week. He would have just strength and clearness enough to retain his sitting posture, but if he tried to get up, he was unsuccessful. He would just lift himself up some inches, and feeling giddy, sink back into his seat as the safer position. Again he would try, with similar results. Only after repeated efforts could he get up

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and go out. On one such occasion, he had got up and was at the door when he found Palaniswami holding him with both his arms. Reproachfully, he asked his faithful Adam, "Why do you hold me ?" The latter replied, "Swami was about to fall, and so I held him and prevented the fall." The Swami was at the time holding the door with both his arms, and was not aware that he was about to fall.

After eighteen months had been spent thus in the midst of visitors' diturbance, to prevent which Palaniswamy often locked the Swami in when he went out, the Swami and his attendant moved on to the adjoining mango grove into which none was allowed to enter except with the permission of the owner, one Venkatarama Naicker. The Swami and Palaniswamy, each occupied a field-watchman's loft, (பரண்) under the shade of a mango tree. Here unmolested by visitors, they felt freer ; and six months were thus happily spent. It was during these months that Palaniswami having ample leisure and access to a library in the town, brought several Tamil books on Vedanta, *e.g.*, Kaivalya Navanitam, Vedanta-Chudamani, Vasishtham, etc. He was struggling painfully with them, word by word, in the Swami's presence. The Swami, wishing to lighten his labour, took each book from him, rapidly absorbed its contents, and retaining the same in his memory, imparted the gist of it to the wondering disciple. The study of books was not necessary for his (the Swami's) religious contemplation or realisation. That had been achieved already and required no fresh buttress. It was the need to explain its ethical and metaphysical basis and to answer the questions of those who resorted to him, book in hand or after studying books, that made him look into such books. With his naturally clear intellect and retentive memory, assisted by his illuminating experience, he easily understood and ex-

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plained them to his questioners. It is in the same way he picked up a knowledge of religious books in other languages also, *e.g*,. in Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam, as also by moving closely with those who had considerable mastery of these languages and in course of time he was able to express his living thought in writing in all these languages.

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CHAPTER XI

TRACED AT LAST

अहमेको न मे कश्चित् नाहमन्यस्य कस्यचित् ।
न तं पश्यामि यस्याहं तं न पश्यामि यो मम ॥

"I am alone. None is mine; of none else am I; I see not any of whom I am; nor do I see one that is mine."

Mahabharata, Sant. 329.

Then one said unto him, "Behold, thy mother and brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."

"But," he answered and said, "who is my mother and who are my brethren?"

St. Mathew.

When Venkataraman suddenly left Madura on the 29th August, 1896, his absence was soon noticed and the letter left by him among his brother's books was picked up. It was like the explosion of a bomb for the family; they never even dreamt that the boy would bolt away. Nothing harsh was said; or at any rate, nothing harsher than the usual scolding, was given him; and yet this boy ran away without telling any one! Where could he have gone? They began to search for him, and communicated the painful news to his mother and relations at Manamadura. To her especially, it was a bolt from the blue. They tried their best to get a clue by enquiring of friends, neighbours and others. But none gave any useful information. The boy had taken away three rupees, and would not be in immediate want. The usual solaces, that the boy would return soon, especially after his funds get exhausted, we may take it, were offered to the mother. Days, weeks, and months passed; yet the boy did not return. The mother grew anxious and entreated her brothers-in-law, Subbier and

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Nelliappier, to go out and seek him and come back with him. Some one had said that the boy had joined a dramatic troupe which was playing at Trivandrum (which then retained its fame as the land of milk and honey, where strangers never lacked food). So, Mr. Nelliappier started for Trivandrum, and enquired of dramatic sets, but found no trace. Alagammal insisted on her joining the search party at the second search; and at Trivandrum, she saw a boy just of Venkataraman's age and height, with similar hair, turning his back on her and going away. That must be Venkataraman she thought. But they would not get at him. Greatly depressed, the search party returned home. And as years passed, the chance of discovering him was getting very remote; and the family well nigh despaired of seeing him again.

In 1898, about August, Subbier died at Madura. Nelliappier and family had gone there for the funeral. Before the ceremonies were over, a young man of Tiruchuzhi gave them unexpected news of their long-lost boy. "Venkataraman is a revered saint at Tiruvannamalai," he said. He mentioned also how he came to learn the fact. He had gone on business to a mutt at Madura and heard one Annamalai Tambiran describing, with great reverence, the sanctity of a young saint living at Tiruvannamalai. Tambiran mentioned the saint as hailing from Tiruchuzhi. This at once pricked the ears of the Tiruchuzhi youth, who then ascertained further particulars from Tambiran. The youth felt that the saint must be *their* Venkataraman and consequently hastened to impart the news to the family.

Soon after the funeral, Nelliappier (who was a second-grade pleader practising at Manamadura) started for Tiruvannamalai along with a friend. They came and found

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that the young Swami had taken his residence at the mango grove. They went there and wanted to enter, but the owner refused them admission. "He is a *mouni*, a silent saint," said he, "why go in and trouble him?" Then they pleaded they were his relatives, and would be content merely to see him, but pleaded in vain. Then Nelliappier wrote a chit,

"மானமதுரை வக்கீல் நெல்லையப்பையர் தரிசனம் செய்ய விரும்புகிறார்"

i.e, "Nelliappier, pleader of Manamadura, wishes to see (you)," and handing it to the garden owner said, "Show him this letter, and if your Swami allows our entry, you may then take us in." This was taken to the Swami, who noticed at once that the chit was a paper of the Registration Department, which on one side had some office matter inscribed on it in his elder brother Nagaswami's handwriting. This showed him that Nagaswami had joined the Registration Department as a clerk. On the other side, the chit bore his uncle's writing. So he agreed to the uncle coming in and seeing him. Nelliappier was then permitted to enter. When he beheld his nephew in the uncouth, dirt-laden Swami before him with matted hair and curly nails, conflicting emotions of joy and sorrow seized him. As the Swami was a *mouni*, Nelliappier addressed Palaniswami and Naicker, and said that it gave him much pleasure to find one of his family attaining high sainthood. However, considerations of comfort should not be ignored. The relatives desired that the young Swami should be near them. They did not want him to abandon his vows or mode of life. Let him continue a *mouni* and an ascetic. But at Manamadura, where Nelliappier was living, the *samadhi* of a great saint was available and the Swami could well go and live there. All his wants would be attended to,

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while his pious dedicated life would be undisturbed. In this strain, the pleader pleaded hard. But whatever success his pleading might have had elsewhere, with his nephew it had absolutely none. Stone-like, the youth sat and heard, showed not the slightest change in his expression. This "sublime repression of himself" (आत्मविनिग्रह) was carried by him to such a degree of perfection that Nelliappier himself felt convinced that his nephew's nature had altered, and that he had not the least desire to be near his relatives. So, he and his friend communicated to Alagammal the good news that her boy had indeed been found and seen by them,—coupled with the distressing news, that the boy was thoroughly altered and did not care to go back; and they left for Madura after a stay of five days at Tiruvannamalai.

For some reasons, the mango grove proving no longer convenient, the Swami moved on to a small temple of Arunagirinathar (the local God—not the Tamil poet of that name). When he started from the grove, he wished to see if he could remain absolutely alone without contact, even the contact of an ardent disciple like Palaniswami; and so he told him: "You go one way, beg your food, and get on. Let me go another way, beg my food and get on. Let us not live together." But Palaniswami after the day's begging was over, came back to the Arunagirinathar temple. "Where can I go? You have the words of life," was what he felt. It was no more possible for him to break away from the Swami, than for a tender calf to break away from its mother.

After a month's stay at that temple and a week's stay in the towers of the big temple and *Alari* garden therein, to which place also many of the Swami's admirers pursued him, he went away to Pavazhakkunru, (one of the spurs of

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the Arunachala Hill) on which were an Iswara temple, a spring and a cave, with a mutt at the foot. In the temple, he would sit and meditate awhile, and, during the absence of Palaniswami from town, would go and beg for food. The temple priest, not caring to see if the Swami was inside the cell within the temple, would sometimes lock him in and go away after performing the worship. Many pious people would go to the Swami and wait for his emergence from the cave or cell. For some five or six months, the Swami stayed at Pavazhakkunru. And before he moved away from there, the firmness of his detachment (*Vairagya*) was again put to a severe test.

When Alagammal learnt of the discomfiture of Nelliappier, she must have put it down to his deficient affection for her son. She would go herself and bring back her beloved son to his old home, she thought. So she told her first son Nagaswamy to obtain leave for a week; but as that was not easy to get, she waited for the Christmas holidays and then started for Tiruvannamalai in company with Nagaswamy. When they reached the place, they learnt that the Swami was at Pavazhakkunru, climbed up and saw him lying on a rock. Alagammal recognised her Venkatraman with true maternal instinct, despite his matted hair, dirt-laden body, overgrown nails and dirty cod-piece. She bemoaned his condition, and requested him to go back; but the lad sat unmoved.

Whether it is a Christian starting on his pilgrimage, or a Maharaja entering on as icism, (துறவு) the call of friends and relatives is sure to come very early as an obstacle to further progress. The attachment to the mother is the oldest and strongest tie binding a man to his home. Yet even that has to be snapped in one's onward march.

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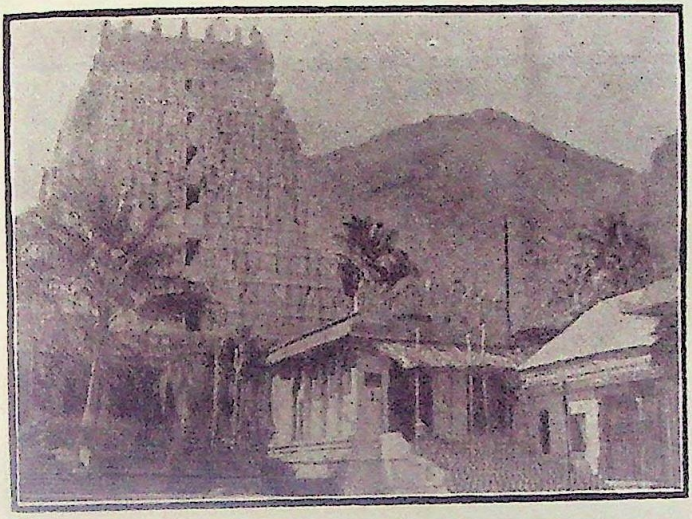

Subramania Temple

Gurumurtam

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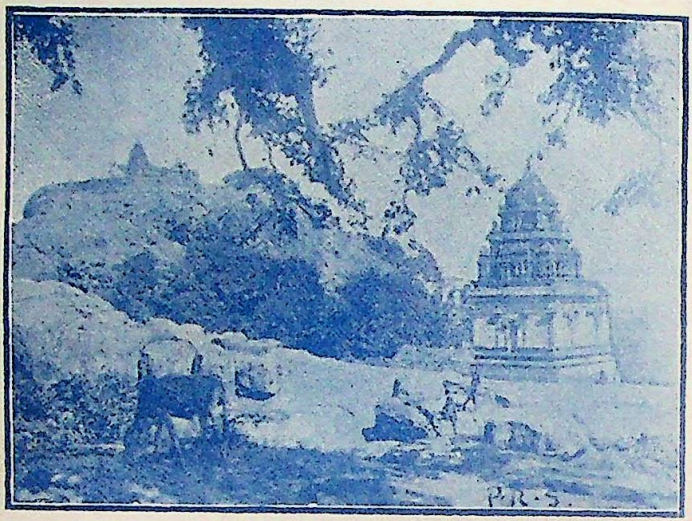
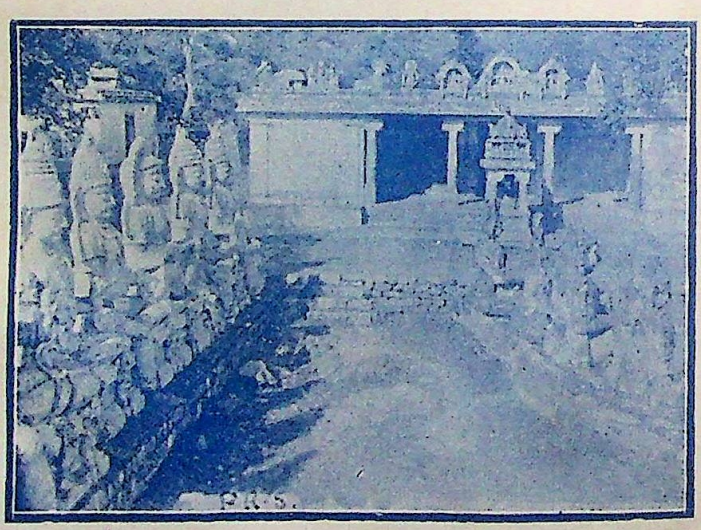


Pavalakkunru



Pachiamma Temple

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The old Adam then pulls off a part of the pilgrim's heart; and much torture has to be endured. Yes, the successful pilgrim or saint faces the ordeal, endures the torture, and is rewarded with a crown of glory and eternal bliss, at the end. Alagammal and Nagaswamy day after day visited the boy, bringing him sweetmeat and their repeated entreaties that he should go back, but they were of no avail. One day however she used her sharpest weapon of attack. As she upbraided Venkataraman for his indifference to her, she suddenly burst into tears. The young Swami could bear it no longer; he got up at once and went away. Again on another day she sought him, and pleaded hard. As the Swami sat still and stone-like she went to the people who had come there, mentioned her relationship, poured her tale of woe into their ears, and requested their intercession with the Swami whom they had come to serve. Then one, among them, Pachaiyappa Pillai said to the Swami:

"Your mother is weeping and praying. Why do you not give her at least a reply? Whether it is 'yes' or 'no', why not give her a reply? Swami need not break his vow of silence. Here are pencil and paper. Swami may at least write out what he has to say."

Thus persuaded, the Swami took up the paper and pencil, and wrote as follows in Tamil:—

"அவர்வர் பிராரப்தப் பிரகாரம் அதற்கானவ ஞங்காங்கிருந் தாட்டுவிப்பன். என்றும், நடவாத தென்முயற்சிக்கினும் நடவாது; நடப்பதென்றடை செய்யினு நில்லாது. இதுவே திண்ணம். ஆகலின் மௌனமாயிருக்கை நன்று."

which means! "The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in

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accordance with their past deeds—their *prarabdhakarma**. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen,—try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is for one to be silent."

Whether this bit of her son's philosophy was sound, or unsound, convincing or unconvincing, she had no option but to go away. The holidays were over, and Nagaswamy had to go back to his office. "Is it for this," sighed she, "we came?," And along with her first son she came down the hill and left for Manamadura, with a heavy heart.

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* Perhaps the idea is best expresssed in Fitzgerald's Rubiat of Omar Khayyum

"The moving finger writes : and having writ
Moves on ; nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

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CHAPTER XII

THE LIGHT ON THE HILL

Ye are the light of the World. A City that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candle-stick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Shortly after the mother and brother left, the Swami quitted Pavazhakkunru and went up the Hill, Arunachala. Here, as varying circumstances dictated, he moved from cave to cave. These were the mansions in his Father's house, and he was welcome and at home, in each. His increasing popularity and esteem, ensured a stream of visitors to give him food, even if he should go to the very top of the hill, which would be about two miles of rugged path from the foot. His first cave on the hill was the Virupaksha. It has the shape of the sacred Pranava Mantra ॐ ("Om"), and contains the sacred remains of a saint, Virupakshadeva. The trustees of the Virupaksha Mutt were supposed to be in charge of it. However when the Swami went up, none was in charge, and the cave was not locked. There were two factions, each claiming the right to control the properties and income of that mutt; and as litigation was still pending, neither party came up to look after the cave, the worship therein and its scanty income at the Kartikai season. So for some years, the Swami was left in undisturbed occupation. Later on, the litigation having ended, the successful party came up at the ensuing Kartikai festival and resumed the levy of a small fee on each visitor to the cave. Formerly, very few would visit and pay. Now that the Swami was occupying it, large crowds daily visited

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it even in months other than Kartikai. A few went there for purposes of picnic, as the adjoining tamarind tree-shade and the streamlet, with its tiny water-fall, were lovely spots for that purpose; but most came for the purely spiritual benefit of beholding the Swami. During the festival the crowds increased tenfold; they poured in to see him. Few of these cared to submit to this levy of three pies per head, and many went away disappointed. This fact soon reached the ears of the Swami. Loathing the acquisition or possession of money for himself, he had an equal loathing to his sanctity being exploited by others, and to the exclusion of the people who could not or would not pay. So he moved out of the cave and sat in the open front-yard under a tree. The agent then shifted his place of collection to the outer compound and still tried to levy the fee from everyone that wished to go near the tree. The Swami had no particular attachment to this cave, though it was highly convenient for his residence. But a further stay there meant his countenancing the extracting of money from the pious visitors,— a tax on piety. So he promptly left that cave for the lower cave, "the Sadguruswami's cave", and thence shifted soon after to another. The levying authorities discovered that their cave was now deserted and that the bees of devotion had flown away to the lower hives and were buzzing round the flower of sainthood there. The only result of their efforts was to oust and inconvenience the Swami without any gain to themselves. Hence they gave up their "dog-in-the-manger" policy, intimated to him that they would not levy any fee so long as he occupied their cave, and invited him to re-occupy it. So the Swami returned to the cave.

The Virupaksha cave was quite suitable for winter residence, but not so for summer, when the adjoining

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streamlet would dry up, and no breeze would get into the cave. There was a crude cave near Mulaipal Tirtham at the foot of a mango tree (whence the cave received its name, the mango-tree-cave) which was unfit for occupation when the Swami first went up the hill. By the enterprise of two brothers, the overhanging rock was blasted, a small front-wall was erected with a very small hole and door—and the cave became tenantable. The brothers invited the Swami to occupy it. Accordingly he spent some of the summer months there, as the adjoining tank (Mulaipal Tirtham) yielded an unfailing supply of pure and potable water. As already stated, wherever he went, his faithful Adam, Palaniswami, was always by his side, rendering service; and crowds of admirers came, many of them bringing with them food, cake, milk, fruits, etc. Besides Palaniswami, others now began to attach themselves permanantly to the Swami and live with him. 'Share and share alike' was always the Swami's motto; and food had to be found for all of them. Since they could not feel sure of the visitors feeding them all, Palaniswami and other dependants would start from the Hill and go to the town to beg food. This would suffice to feed the Swami, his attendants and visitors, both day and night. Those who went called upon God, as they went on blowing the conch, and begging. For this purpose, Brahmana Swami composed his poem *Aksharamanamalai*, full of pathos and philosophy.

How was the Swami spending his time in all these caves ? Exactly in the same way as at Gurumurtam, mango tope, and Pavazhakkunru. There was no noticeable variation in his life. " As it was in the beginning, so it is now." He was spending his time mostly in meditation or rather realisation.

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यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यात् आत्मतृप्तश्चमानवः ।
आत्मन्येवच सन्तुष्टः तस्यकार्यं न विद्यते ॥

"For one who rejoices in, and is contented with, the Self, there is nothing to do."

But often when visitors or dependants came up and wished to clear their doubts, relating mostly to the books they read and brought with them, he would read and master the books with ease, and give them a simple solution based partly on the books and partly on his own experience and knowledge. The Swami's teachings would throw clear and fresh light on their problems, and give them a new angle of vision ; and the solution would be quite simple. Palaniswami continued to bring books from the town. A Sastri from Chidambaram came up and left his Vivekachudamani, (by Sri Sankaracharya), an excellent manual of Vedantism in Sanskrit, beyond which one need read nothing to prepare oneself for self-realization on the lines of Advaitism. This, with the help of a Tamil versified translation brought by Palaniswami, was mastered in no time. Later on, the Swami rendered it into easy Tamil prose at the request of some devotees.

Happy are they who have no history to be written about them. The Swami's personal history practically ended with his advent to the Hill ; and thereafter, it is really the history of those who went to him and came under his influence which his historian or biographer has to write. Though their name is legion, a few* may be selected, to give the reader an idea of the Swami's life, influence, and teachings.

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* Any selection seems invidious. But some have to be selected and, of course, from those whose spiritual careers have been communicated to the author.

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Uddandi Nayinar, the first to receive the Swami's instructions, went away in 1897, to his mutt. He visited the Swami again seven years later. After disposing of his acquisitions, mostly for charity, he brought a sum of one hundred rupees and offered it to the Swami—as *gurudakshina* (gift to the preceptor). But the Guru strictly adhered to this vow of poverty, and sternly refused to receive the grateful disciple's offer. But Nayinar was not to be so easily put off, and he left the sum—without the Swami's knowledge—with another devotee instructing him to apply it to any good purpose for the Swami or such as the Swami would approve of. The fund remained idle for some years. Meanwhile, the Swami's half-written Tamil translation of Vivekachudamani was picked up and quickly completed; this fund of one hundred rupees was utlilised for printing the book; and Nayinar rejoiced in it.

Nayinar visited the Swami once or twice again and left the body about 1916, having no doubt gained considerable spiritual purity and excellence at the feet of the Master.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE SWAMI AND BOOK-LORE

And what delights can equal those
That stir spirit's inner deeps,
When one that loves but knows not, reaps
A truth from one that loves and knows ?

Tennyson.

When Brahmana Swami came to Virupaksha cave he still attracted large crowds,— all sorts and conditions of men, the poor expecting some food or help from others who came there, the curious loving novelty, the proud scholar to see if the Swami was learned, and lastly the humble and pious students of religious literature, anxious to get the gracious words of enlightenment from one that had achieved self-realisation. Of this last class, Uddandi Nayinar and Annamalai Tambiran who came to him on the plains, were good examples. Even on the hill, such people occasionally visited the Swami. A Sastri from Chidambaram, as already stated, came with a copy of Sankaracharya's 'Vivekachudamani,' and left it with the Swami, who perused it. With his powerful memory, clear intellect, fresh mind and keen interest, and above all, his deep religious introspection the Swami, with a single glance at a book, was able to take in not merely the meaning, but also the very words and to indelibly imprint these on the tablets of his memory. Padmanabha Swami (known as Jatai Swami on account of his matted locks) had with him several Sanskrit books on Mantra and Ayurveda, a Brihat-Stotra-Ratnakara and other works of religious and philosophic interest. The

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Brahmana Swami would visit his Asram on the Hill in the early days of his sojourn and occasionally dip into several of these very quickly. When once some one asked Padmanabha Swami about some matter, the *Mouni* Brahmana Swami picked up Brihat-Stotra-Ratnakara and pointed out a passage in answer. Padmanabha Swami wondered at the ready and appropriate answer. He would often have this *Mouni's* help in such matters. The young Swami's mind was fresh and plastic. Several scholars and persons of vast experience and skill went to the Swami to get inspiration, and freely ventilated their thoughts before him. What with the hearing of recitations and the reading of books brought to him by Palaniswami and others, the Swami was getting conversant with the philosophical literature of the land.

G. Seshier was Municipal Overseer at Tiruvannamalai about 1900; and from that time, he assiduously paid his respects to the Swami. He was a devout Ramabhakta (devotee of Rama) constantly repeating the holy name of Rama with or without musical accompaniments. He was also studying Yoga, specially Vivekananda's lectures (in English) on Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, etc., and an English translation of Rama Gita. Finding some difficulty in understanding these and similar books, he brought them to the Swami and mentioned his difficulties. The Swami then went through each of them and wrote out in easy Tamil prose, the gist of these works on bits of paper and answered similarly supplemental questions. Thus Seshier had quite a sheaf of these slips written by the Swami in 1900, 1901 and 1902; and he copied them into a small note-book. Some years ago Seshier left this world; but his note-book and some of the slips, which had been preserved, were obtained through the kindness of his elder brother, G. Krishna Iyer. From these slips

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and the note book, the recent publication, "Vichara Sangraha" was prepared, which may therefore be regarded as the gist of the Swami's earliest teachings. There may be difficulty in piecing out from these slips what the Swami mentioned as matters of his own experience, and what was picked up otherwise. About one passage however, it was ascertained from him that it described the actual experience he had in July and August 1896, and later. That has been incorporated into Chapter V *supra*.

One feature of the Swami's dealing with such disciples is noticeable. He would let them take their own course for a while, giving them advice for pursuing the line of thought or action already taken by them ; and only at a later stage, would he turn them into his own line of thought.

यस्य यस्य हि यो भावस्तेन तेन समाचरेत् ।
अनुप्रविश्य मेधावी क्षिप्रमात्मवशं नयेत् ॥

i.e., "Give him full rope and then pull him ashore," has been his principle. This is especially noticeable in Seshier's case. Seshier was deeply interested in *Ashtanga Yoga* and attached great importance to breath-control *(Pranayama)*. The Swami has said over and over again that he never cared to practise *Pranayama*, and that it is only *one* of the means employed for subduing the mind for a while and fixing it on one point within, and on the Self at last. In the Swami's case, the mind's outgoing tendency was arrested in his own peculiar way, and he attained *samadhi* without trying to control his breath. As this pupil was anxious to know about *Pranayama*, the Swami studied the easy brochure of Vivekananda and wrote down brief notes. We notice that at each stage, when the opportunity offers, he puts in a word about the need for going deeper, and even interprets *Ashtanga Yoga* in a spiritual way. The subject of realisa-

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tion is gradually broached after a few preliminary explanations of the mind, of the centre, "the heart," and of the rudiments of the epistemology and metaphysics as conceived by Indian thinkers and set out in Hindu books. The Swami never claimed to make any critical study of Indian thought or offer his own estimate of the various schools. The Swami reads the book preferred by the particular disciple and offers him the opinion of the school embodied therein. He never engages in religious or other controversy, as it concerns only the externals and is in the region of activities of the intellect. When the intellect gives place to intuition, there is no difference in the ultimate realisation, be it that of an European, American or Indian, be it that of an *Advaitin* or *Dvaitin* or *Visishtadvaitin*, a *Saivite* or *Sakta*. The works dealt with by him by way of translation into Tamil or adaptation are however works of the *Advaitic* school. Succeeding chapters will enable the reader to judge for himself how the Swami's line of thought should be classed.

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CHAPTER XIV

M. SIVAPRAKASAM PILLAI AND THE SWAMI

"कोहं कथमिदं चेति संसारमलमाततं।
प्रविचार्य प्रयत्नेन प्राज्ञेन सहसाधुना ॥"

Who am I? Whence is this widespread *Samsara*, *i.e.*, flow of births and deaths? These, the wise should enquire into diligently, soon—nay, now."

Mahopanishad IV, 21.

कोहं कथमिदं किंवा कथं मरणजन्मनी।
विचारयान्तरेवेत्थं महत्तत्फलमेष्यसि ॥

Who am I? How (came) this (world)? What is it? How (came) death and birth? Thus inquire within yourself, and great will be your benefit therefrom. *Annapurnopanishad I, 49.*

राम स्वात्मविचारोयं कोहं स्यामिति रूपकः।
चित्तदुर्द्रुमबीजस्य दहने दहनस्स्मृतः ॥

Rama, this inquiry "Who am I?" is the quest of the self and is said to be the fire that burns up the seed of the poisonous weed of conceptual thought. *Vasishtam.*

The next person of note to whom the Swami imparted instruction, was M. Sivaprakasam Pillai (a graduate in Philosophy) employed in the Revenue Department of the South Arcot Collectorate from 1900 to 1910. During his college days the question of personality, the question "Who am I?" arose in the course of his studies, but he did not pursue the inquiry with vigour. He happened to go to Tiruvannamalai for the first time in 1902, on account of official work. He

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then heard of the singularly selfless and illuminated life the Swami led. So he visited him, waited on him patiently, and entreated him to give him guidance and instruction. He also put the Swami some questions in connection with the above inquiry. At that time, the Swami was observing silence. Therefore the questions were sometimes answered by gestures. At times when such answers were not understood, they were written down by the Swami on the floor or on a slate. The questions and answers were published by Sivaprakasam Pillai in 1923, along with a couple of poems describing the Swami's life and his own special experiences with the Swami. Of the answers to the questions, that relating to the fourteenth was written down by the Swami on a slate, and copied immediately after on paper by the questioner and retained by him. The other questions and answers were retained by him in memory and written down subsequently. These however had not immediately affected his official life. His nonattachment was slowly developing, and resulted ultimately (*i.e.*, in 1910) in his resignation of service. He continued his visits to the Swami, off and on. However, there was no perceptible break with his past, nor had he any emotional experience in what he learnt from the Swami till 1913. He had then become a widower, and it was all important for him to decide if he should wed or lead a *vanaprastha's* (forest hermit's) life. If he was to wed, the choice of the bride was another difficult problem. Above all, marriage meant, in his community and circumstances, considerable expense; and how he was to obtain the needed sum was perplexing his mind. To solve these problems, he hit upon a plan. He had faith in the local God *Vighneswara* and accordingly repaired to His temple at night; and there he intently prayed to Him as his sole refuge and help. He set down on paper the

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questions noted hereunder, and prayed that he might be blessed with a vision and personal instruction, or (if that were not possible,) that appropriate answers might appear written on the paper under each of the questions, and that in any case the answers should be forthcoming before the night ended. He further said in his prayer that, if instructions were issued to him, he would follow them and if none were issued, he would only have to go to the Brahmana Swami at Tiruvannamalai and be guided by his wisdom.

The questions were as follows :—

(1) What am I to do, to escape all sorrows and cares on earth?

(2) Shall I get married to the particular girl I am thinking of?

(3) If that is not to be, why is it not to be?

(4) If the marriage is to come off, how is the necessary fund to be secured?

This questionnaire was reverently placed by Sivaprakasam Pillai at the feet of Vighneswara; and all night long he waited in patient expectation. But the night was spent, and dawn broke, without his seeing any vision. As for the question paper, it remained there just as he left it; no answer had been vouchsafed. With a sad heart, he then went away from the image that having ears heard not, and having a mouth spoke not, and came to the living Guru, the Brahmana Swami, who could hear and speak. Evidently God Vighneswara* fulfilled Himself once more by transferring His devotee to Brahmana Swami. Pillai patiently waited on the Swami at the Virupaksha cave, without mentioning his worries, and noted what transpired. Numbers came to the Swami; and the Swami was discoursing with them on the *summum-bonum* of life, Self-reali-

*Same as Vinayaka referred to on p. 57.

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sation, and the spiritual one-pointed life, the way to reach it. Day after day, Pillai stayed by his side without mentioning his thoughts and found he was giving such unwordly instruction to all comers. He found that the Swami's life and teachings were themselves replies to his unuttered questions. The Swami was in strict *Brahmacharya* (abstinence) and yet was undisturbed by sex passion; and, as for money, he never even mentioned it, nor wanted it. Yet, he was quite happy. He had realised the Self. There was nothing more for him to desire or achieve. Pillai felt ashamed to broach the subject of marriage, or funds for marriage, in such a Presence, and was convinced that the Swami's life and teachings gave a negative reply to his second question.

When he thought of going back to his village, *i. e.*, on 4th May, 1913, something remarkable took place. There were many persons with the Swami; and Pillai also was sitting near the Swami. He went on gazing at the Swami; and ere long, he had a strange vision. The Swami's face was no longer the ordinary human face. A dazzling aura was surrounding him. From his head, lo! a golden child gradually emerged and before long re-entered it. This strange phenomenon repeated itself twice or thrice. Sivaprakasam Pillai could hold out no more. He felt deeply agitated at this sudden proof of the existence of a higher benign power.* His heart was welling up with emotion; tears of ecstasy flowed from his eyes; and he sobbed for some moments, unable to express what he felt. Those present did not see any vision and wondered what the matter was with Pillai. When later, he communicated his vision, they attributed it to the *ganja* (canabis indica)

* *Cf.* W. James' Varieties of R. E. pp. 190—2. 219, 228, 276 269 (Conquering sex.)

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which he had eaten; and they cracked jokes at his expense. He was in no joking mood however. Next evening, that is, on the 5th May, he sat up before the Swami. This day also he saw visions. The Swami was suddenly seen surrounded by a halo which was as powerful as a number of full moons thrown together. The Swami's body was shining like a golden (morning) sun. Then again he saw the entire body smeared with white holy ashes.† The Swami's eyes beamed with mercy. There were others in the room at the time, but they did not see any such vision. Pillai did not ask the Swami about these matters, nor did the Swami say anything. Two days later, when Pillai went and saw the Swami, the latter appeared like a mass of crystal to Pillai's eyes. Pillai's heart was overflowing with joy and he was afraid to leave the Swami lest the joy should suddenly cease. All this convinced Sivaprakasam Pillai that he had obtained the grace of the Swami. He resolved to lead a similar life of *Tapas* (austere penance) curbing all sex desires and observing *Brahmacharya* (abstinence).

All the above facts are substantially taken from Pillai's *Anugraha Ahaval*, a Tamil poem wherein he gratefully describes his relations with the Swami. From these, one feels that this Swami has a powerful, magnetic personality, that by staying with him for some time, a person may change his life, habits and instincts, and that by the Swami's grace one can receive faith in God as tangibly and certainly as one receives a fruit or a book.

The fourteen questions and answers elicited in 1902, or soon after from the Swami are set out hereunder:—

I. Sivaprakasam Pillai: Swami, Who am I? How is salvation attained?

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† In point of fact, the Swami had not ashes on his entire body at any time.

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The Swami: By incessantly pursuing within yourself the inquiry 'Who am I,' you will know your true self and thereby attain salvation.

II. Pillai: Who am I?

Swami: The real 'I' or true self is not the body nor any of the five senses, nor the sense-objects, nor the organs of action, nor the *Prana*, (breath or vital force), nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state where there is no cognisance of these.

III. P: If I am not any of these, what else am I?

S: After excluding each of the above, saying 'This is not I,' that which remains alone, is 'I'; and that is consciousness.

IV. P: What is the nature of that consciousness?

S: It is *Sat Chit Ananda*: (*i.e.*, reality-consciousness-bliss), where there is not even the slightest trace of the thought 'I,' at all. This is also called *Mouna* (silence), *Atman* (Self). The only thing that exists is That. The three (the world, ego, and God personal, *Iswara*) if considered as separate entities, are mere illusions, like the appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl. But God, the *Jiva* (ego) and the world as *Sivaswarupa* or *Atmaswarupa* are the Real one.

V. P: How are we to realise that Real (or *Sivaswarupa*)?

S: When the external objects (*drisya*) vanish, the true nature of the seer or subject is realised (to be the Real, the Absolute).

VI. P: Can we not realise that (*Sivaswarupa*) while we see objects also?

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S: No. Because, the seer (the noumenon) and the seen (phenomena) are like the rope and the appearance of a serpent therein. Unless you get rid of the super-imposed illusion of a serpent, you cannot believe that what exists is only the rope.

VII. P: When will the external objects vanish?

S: If the mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, vanishes, the external objects will vanish.

VIII. P: What is the nature of the mind?

S: Mind is merely thoughts. It is a form of energy. It manifests itself as objects *(i.e.,* the world). When the mind sinks within the Self, *i.e.*, the *Sivaswarupa*, then the Self is realised. When the mind issues out, the world appears, and the Self is not realised.

IX. P: How will the mind vanish?

S: Only by pursuing the inquiry "Who am I?" Though this enquiry is a mental operation only, it destroys all mental operations, including itself just as the stick, with which the funeral pyre is kindled, is itself reduced to ashes after the pyre and corpses have been burnt. Then we attain knowledge or realisation of the Self. Then the thought 'I' (personality) is dissolved; breathing and other activities of *prana* (vitality) are subdued. Both, personality and breathing (*i.e., pranas)* have a common source. Whatever you do, do without egoism, *(i.e.,)* without feeling "I am doing this." When one reaches that state, even one's own wife will be seen by him as the Mother of the universe. True *Bhakti* (devotion) is the surrender of one's ego into the Self.

X. P: Are there not other methods to make the mind disappear?

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S: Except enquiry, there is no other adequate method. If the mind is lulled by other means, it keeps quiet for a while, but again jumps up and returns to its former activity.

XI. P: But when will these instincts and innumerable self-preserving and other latent tendencies *(vasanas)* in us, be subdued?

S: The more you withdraw into the self, the more these tendencies pale off; and finally they leave you.

XII. P: Is it indeed possible to root out all these tendencies, which have soaked into our minds, in numerous births?

S: Never yield room for doubts of that sort in your mind. But firmly resolve, and dive into the Self. The mind, constantly directed by the above inquiry into the Self, becomes dissolved, and transformed in the end, into the Self. Whenever you feel any doubt, do not try to clear the doubt; but try to know him who feels the doubt.

XIII. P: How long should one go on with this inquiry?

S:—It is needed so long as there is the least trace of tendencies in the mind to create thoughts. So long as your enemies occupy a citadel, they will be issuing out. If you kill each as he issues out, the citadel will be captured by you in the end. Similarly, each time thoughts rear their heads and issue out, crush them by the above inquiry. This process of crushing out all thoughts at their birth-place or place of origin, is termed *Vairagya* (dispassion). Hence inquiry is needful right up to the time of Self-realisation. What is required is a continuous and uninterrupted "thought" of the real Self.

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XIV. P : Is not all this the universe, with what takes place therein, the result of Iswara's (God's) will ; and if so why should God will thus ?

S: God has no purpose. He is not fettered by any action. The world's activities cannot affect Him. Let us take the analogies of the sun and space, to make this clear. The sun rises without any desire, purpose, or effort. But directly the sun rises, numerous activities take place on this earth. The lens placed in its rays produces fire in its focus ; the bud of the lotus blossoms, water evaporates, and every living object on the earth enters upon, maintains, and finally drops its activity. But the sun is not affected by all such activity, as it merely maintains its nature, acts by fixed laws, has no purpose, and is merely a witness. So it is with God. Again, take the case of space or ether. Earth water, fire and air, are all in it, and have their motions and modifications therein. Yet none of these affects ether or space. The same is the case with God. God has no desire or purpose in His acts of creation, maintenance, destruction withdrawal, and salvation, to which the beings *(Jivas)* are subjected. As the beings *(Jivas)* reap the fruits of their acts in accordance with His laws (the laws of *Karma*, etc) the responsibility * for such fruits is theirs, not God's. God is not affected or bound by any acts.

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* Creation is unique. It is, in or after the creation of Time, Cause, individuals and social groups, that the ideas of 'purpose' and responsibility' (a purely social idea) emerge. There is no logic or meaning in applying these ideas to that which is beyond creation, *i.e.*, to God. Responsibility involves the idea of another. If God is regarded as immanent in all, there is no 'other' and hence no responsibility, for God.

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CHAPTER XV

GANAPATI SASTRI AND THE SWAMI

A. Ganapati Sastri, known by his title Kavya Kantha, is the next disciple to be mentioned. His birth and early life have much of romance in them. At his birth in 1878, his father Narasimha Sastri who was before the God Ganapati at Benares, had a vision of something like a babe or a little animal running up to his feet from the God; and that was the reason for the child's name Ganapati. Though dumb and afflicted with all sorts of disease, like enlarged liver and spleen and epileptic fits during his first five years, he was relieved of them in his sixth year by branding with red-hot iron; as though to make amends for the past dumbness, Ganapati Sastri exhibited marvellous powers of perception, attention, recollection and resource. Things once read were immediately understood, and never forgotten. He could attend to eight or ten things at a time *(Ashtavadhana)*. He picked up learning with avidity; and at the age of ten, he had composed a verse in Sanskrit, prepared astrological almanacs, and mastered several *Kavyas* (literary works,) and elementary books on grammar. At twelve, he wrote *Bhringasandesa* in two cantos of *Mandakranta* metre, closely imitating Kalidasa. At fourteen, he had mastered the *Panchakavyas* and the chief books on Sanskrit prosody and Rhetoric, besides being familiar with the contents of the national Epics, the *Itihasas*, Ramayana and Mahabharata, and some *Puranas*. At this age, he could speak fluently and write with ease, in Sanskrit. Besides literary ambition, he was from the age of ten consumed by

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another, which has dominated his life ever since. The *Itihasas* and *Puranas*, *i.e.*, National Epics and Legends fired him with emulation of the ancient Rishis and Saints. If Viswamitra and Dhruva could by their *tapas*, *i.e.*, *Mantra-japa* (repetition of sacred syllables) attain power enough to create new worlds or rise to be the pole star, he, Ganapati Sastri, of Kalavarai, could do the same. So, from the age of eighteen, *i.e.*, soon after his marriage was consummated, he was visiting holy places like the banks of the Godavari, the Ganges and the Jumna, as specially appropriate for his purpose, and spending considerable periods of time, repeating the *Sivapanchakshari Mantra* mostly, though he had initiation into, and practice of, many other *mantras* also. The interesting adventures of his *tapas*, which form the main item of his life, would fill a small volume; but these are foreign to the purpose of this book. Suffice it to say, that after a dozen trips to various parts of India and performing *tapas* in each place with a view to make Mahadeva (Siva) appear before him and grant him boons, he came to Tiruvannamalai first in 1903-4 and next in 1907, to some extent sadder and wiser. Though he had repeated a crore of *Sivapanchakshari* and as often written out Siva's name, there had only been a few momentary visions and experiences which may be interpreted as appearances of *Siva*, but God had not appeared to grant him any boons; and it looked as though his life's quest was a blank failure. His literary ambition had meanwhile taken him to Nuddea, where he dazzled a *Pandita Sabha*, an assembly of scholars (under the presidentship of Asukavi Ambikadatta), with his mastery of Sanskrit style and literature, with his ease in *impromptu versification*, and his ready resource in *Samasya-poorana* and obtained the title (and diploma of) *Kavya Kantha* in 1900.

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But even in the literary field he had achieved nothing useful, nothing of any worth to his generation or to posterity, as was his lofty ambition to achieve. In 1903, he had chosen Tiruvannamalai as a good and holy seat of Siva in the shape of a *Jyotir linga*, for continuing his *tapas*. Incidentally having heard of Brahmana Swami on the Hill, he visited him twice in the course of a twelve-months' stay. He then went away to Vellore as a teacher in a school, and organised a band of pupils round him who, with him for their head and guide, would develop their *Sakti* by force of *mantra* japa, to such an extent as might impress the world with their ideas, and help in the uplift of their country, if not of humanity.

After a short while, about December 1907, he gave up his post at the Vellore school and returned to Tiruvannamalai to resume his *mantra* japa. Doubts were oppressing him whether with all his vast study of *Puranas*, *Itihasas*, *Kavyas*, the whole of the Rig Veda, some Upanishads and several books on Mantra Sastra, he had correctly understood the nature and the essentials of *Tapas*, since nothing tangible seemed to emerge from his dozen years of penance in all sorts of places and under the most rigorous conditions. On the ninth day of the Kartikai festival, about 1-30 p. m., he recollected that there was a Brahmana Swami on the Hill and that he must certainly know the true nature of tapas from his own experience. In that hot hour, he climbed up the Hill. The Swami could distinctly remember him as the Pandit who, at his very first visit in 1903, interpreted the well-known stotra of Vinayaka, as

शुक्लांबरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ।
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

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applying to him (the Brahmana Swami) also, since this Swami also wore white cloth, was all-pervasive (being identified with Divinity), was of a pleasing moonlike colour, had consumed his *Antahkarana* (mind composed of the four parts *Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Ahankara*, and *Chitta,i.e.*, mind, reason, ego and will or desire), was of a gracious mien, and would if requested remove obstacles from his devotee's path. The Swami with his fresh memory could not have forgotton that scene, nor the great sensation which Sastri (then a meanly-dressed sorry figure, moving up and down, unnoticed through the streets of Tiruvannamalai) produced in Kartikai of 1904, by reading a thousand brilliant Sanskrit verses on Siva which he had composed in Arunachaleswara temple in the few weeks preceding the festival.

Sastri quivered with emotion as he walked up to the Virupaksha cave. Luckily for him the Swami was seated alone on the outer *pial*. Sastri fell flat on his face and held the Swami's feet with both hands ; and his voice trembled with emotion as he cried : " All that has to be read, I have read. Even Vedanta Sastra, I have fully understood. I have performed Japa to my heart's content. Yet I have not up to this time understood what *Tapas* is. Hence have I sought refuge at thy feet. Pray enlighten me about the nature of *Tapas*." For fifteen minutes, the Swami silently gazed at Sastri, as he sat at his feet in anxious expectation. None came to interrupt them at the time. Then the Swami spoke in short and broken sentences in Tamil :

நான் நான் என்பது எங்கேயிருந்து புறப்படுகிறதோ அதை கவனித்தால் மனம் அங்கே லீனமாகும். அதுவே தபஸ்.

" If one watches whence this notion " I " springs, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *Tapas*."

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ஒரு மந்திரத்தை ஜபம் பண்ணினால் அந்த மந்திரத்வனி எங்கிருந்து புறப்படுகிறது என்று கவனித்தால் மனம் அங்கே லீனமாகிறது. அதுதான் தபஸ்.

" When a mantra is repeated, if attention is directed to the source whence the mantra-sound is produced,* the mind is absorbed in that. That is Tapas."

This instruction filled Sastri's heart with joy. He stayed for some hours and ascertained the Swami's name from the attendant Palaniswamy to be " Venkatarama Ayyar." Sastri immediately composed five stanzas in praise of the Swami wherein he contracted his name into "Ramana" which has stuck to the Swami ever since. In the letter which Sastri wrote next day to his relations and disciples, he mentioned the '*Upadesa*' instruction he received from the Swami known as "Brahmana Swami on the Hill"; and added that he must be called a Maharshi, since his teaching was quite original, and nothing like what had ever been found in any book (that Sastri had read). He wished all his own disciples should style Brahmana Swami § " *Bhagavan Maharshi.*" Since that date, the name

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* The source when the mantra-sound is produced, is not merely the vocal organs but going further, it is the *idea* of the sound in the mind, the central force whence the mind and the breath, *i.e.*, intellectual and vegetative activities arise, the Self.

§ " The name Ramana or rather Ramani was the pet name given to the Swami (when he was a little boy) by Lakshmanier, an aged relation proficient in Telugu; but long ago it fell into desuetude especially after the youth left Tiruchuzhi. The term *rishi* has been defined; and to prove the appropriateness of the name, the definitions are here given.

१. "ऊर्ध्वरेतास्तपस्युग्रो नियताशीच सम्यमी ।
शापानुग्रहयोश्शक्तः सत्यसंधो भवेदृषिः ॥

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Ramana Maharshi has come into vogue among cultured devotees ; and to Sastri must be given the credit for the currency of this name. As Sastri considered the *Upadesa* he received from the Maharshi, to be the result of Mother Sakti's *anugraha* (grace), he composed a thousand stanzas in her praise, and styled it "*Umasahasra*" ; and in three weeks' time, he finished it. On the last night, he sat up at the "mango-tree cave" with four amanuenses to whom he dictated verses, almost simultaneously. Two hundred or more, of such *impromptu* verses were thus produced by him at one sitting, in the white heat of poetic inspiration, in about four hours' time, *i.e*,. between 8 p.m. and mid-night ! At the time he had the inspiring presence, in that cave, of Ramana Maharshi.

In January, February and March, 1908, Maharshi and Ganapati Sastri spent three months at Pachaiamman Koil, with a large number of others. Many also were the visitors. G. Seshayya and others cooked for the whole party. Another of Swami's devotees, Rangaswami Iyengar, bore the brunt of the expenses. Sastri went on, touching up his "Umasahasra" and developing his *Dhyana*, in accordance with Maharshi's directions. His main objective in life had not of course been abandoned. He still believed, like Confucius, that he had a lofty mission in life, and that he had adequate power to carry it out. Society in India had yet to be revivified, and old yet bright ideas of the Vedic

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२. तपोनिर्धूतपाप्मानः यथातथ्याभिधायिनः ।
वेदवेदाङ्गतत्त्वज्ञा ऋषयः परिकीर्तिताः ॥

३. तपश्शौचपरादान्ताः सत्यवाचो बहुश्रुताः । वेदवेदाङ्ग etc.

४. ऐश्वर्यस्य समग्रस्य धर्मस्य यशसः श्रियः ।
ज्ञानवैराग्ययोश्चापि षण्णांवर्गो भगोमतः ॥

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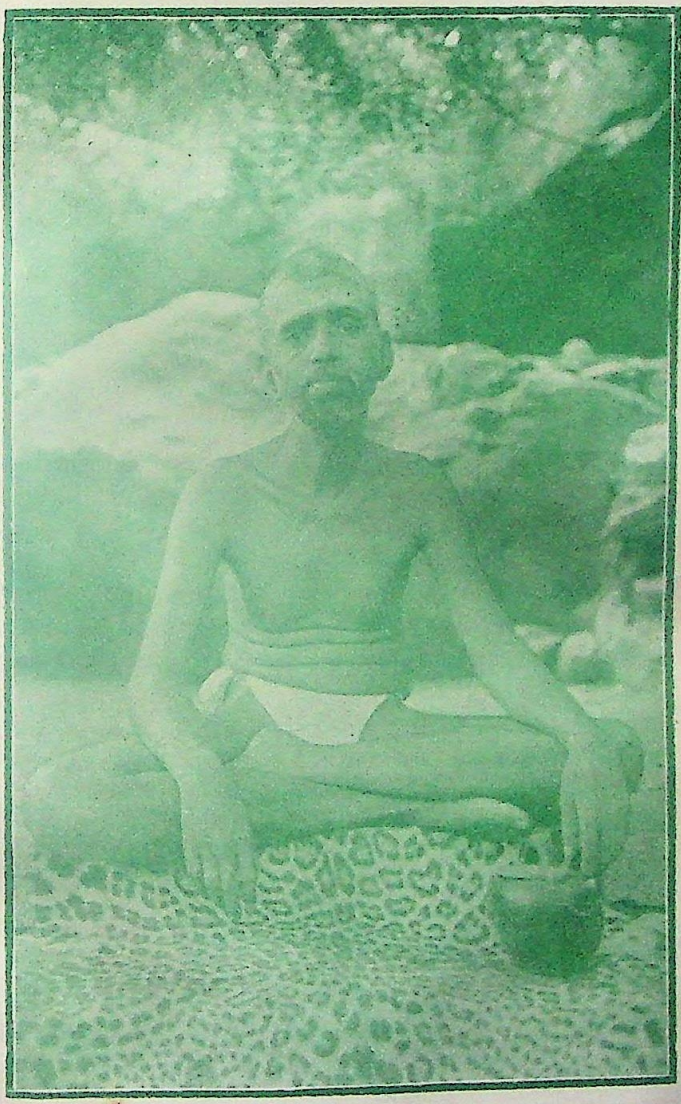

Youth (Brahmanaswami)

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Kavya Kanta Ganapathi Sastri

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times, resuscitated. New and deleterious growths, which impeded national life, had to be got rid of. And the entire panoply of heavenly forces (Sakti) had yet to be drawn down by Sastri himself and his associates and pupils who formed a *Sangha* (society) for developing Sakti by *mantra japa* (holy incantations) mainly. When Sastri left Tiruvannamalai after March, 1908, he asked for Maharshi's permission. At that time he asked Maharshi " Is the seeking of the source of the 'I' thought, sufficient for the accomplishment of all my aims, or is, *Mantra Dhyana* needed ?" Maharshi answered, "The former would suffice"; and when asked about the aim, added " You had better throw the entire burden on the Lord (*Iswara*). He will carry all burdens and you will be freed from the burdens. He will do His duty."

Kavyakantha G. Sastri was frequently visiting Tiruvannamalai and Maharshi, in subsequent years. By his thorough mastery of Sanskrit language, and the ease and excellence of his Sanskrit poetry, he must, to some extent, have influenced Maharshi who was always receiving ideas and language from persons and books, almost unconsciously. The Swami, who began to learn Sanskrit from his perusal of Vivekachudamani with its Tamil verse translation, made very rapid progress and was able to compose a stanza in 1915, and Arunachala Pancharatna in 1917, and Upadesasara in 1927. The contact with Sastri was perhaps one of the elements in developing Maharshi's command of Sanskrit.

Sastri's chief service in connection with Ramana Maharshi is his eliciting (through his friends or directly) the replies of Maharshi to social and religious questions that constantly arise in the course of one's spiritual develop-

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ment. The first set of questions was in December 1913 and the other questions were in July and August 1917. He embodied, in eighteen chapters of verse, the answers to these questions which he named *Ramana Gita*.

Sastri was not a mere pandit learned in Sanskrit, but a bold critic too, especially in matters of age and authenticity of Sanskrit works. In caste and other matters of social institutions, the age of marriage, untouchability etc., he was quite modern. He has always been "masterful," and seldom failed to impress those with whom he came in close contact, with his own ideas and attitude. During 1922-29, (for over 7 years) he lived at Tiruvannamalai, mostly with his family. He was always consulted by Maharshi on matters of importance, especially publications and other activities at the Asram.

Some visions to Ganapati Sastri (who appears to have had a good number of such experiences in the course of his eventful life) of Ramana Maharshi may be set out here, as related by Sastri.

When Sastri was with Maharshi at Pachaiamman Koil in the beginning of 1908, something like a meteor appeared at dawn, and touched Maharshi's forehead, retreated, and came again and touched him six times.

The same year, Sastri went away to Tiruvottiyur near Madras for *Tapas*. There was a Ganesa temple and Sastri performed his *tapas* near it, observing a vow of silence for eighteen days. On the eighteenth day, when Sastri was lying down, wide awake, he saw the figure of Maharshi coming in and sitting next to him. Sastri sat up in wonder and tried to get up. But Maharshi pressed him down holding him by the head. This gave Sastri something like

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an electric shock, and Sastri regarded this as *Hastadiksha*, *i.e.*, as grace of the Guru conferred with his hand.

Ever since Maharshi went to Tiruvannamalai on 1—9—1896, he has not left that place and never in his life seen Tiruvottiyur. But as Sastri was narrating the above in his presence on 17—10—1929, Maharshi spoke as follows:—

"One day some years ago, I lay down. But I was not in *samadhi*. I suddenly felt my body carried up higher and higher, till all objects disappeared and all around me was one vast mass of white light. Then suddenly the body descended and objects began to appear. I said to myself, evidently this is how Siddhas appear and disappear. The idea occurred to me that I was at Tiruvottiyur. I was on a high road and went along that road. One side of it and some distance removed from it, was a Ganapati temple. I went in, and talked, and what I said or did, I do not recollect. Suddenly I woke up and found myself in a lying posture in the Virupaksha Cave. I mentioned this immediately to Palaniswami who was always with me."

Sastri found that Maharshi's description of the place at Tiruvottiyur exactly tallied with the Ganesa temple at which he carried on his *tapas*.

Perhaps some light may be thrown on the above if the following facts are also remembered.

Ganapati Sastri with his colossal learning, remarkable genius and powerful, nay masterful, personality, came to the young Swami (more or less of his own age) who had little knowledge of Sanskrit and who was rapidly absorbing impressions from the books and men he came across. Sastri and all the members of his family with the band (for

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he always had the knack of organisation) of his own disciples became the Swami's disciples and were very strongly attached to the Swami. The Swami in turn had not merely great admiration for Sastri but was deeply interested in him and his extraordinary aims and aspirations, as also in his family concerns. The Swami has occasionally submitted his own Sanskrit composition to Sastri for correction of grammatical or idiomatic errors, as Swami had never studied Sanskrit grammar but picked up the language by the natural method of picking up sentences and phrases from books and men.

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CHAPTER XVI

M. V. RAMASWAMY IYER, ECHAMMAL, RAGHAVACHARI

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनितुष्यति ॥
तं विद्यात् ॥ etc.

"Learn that yoga, by practising which the mind held within itself rejoices, the self seeing the Self, delights in the Self."

Bh. Gita VI.

The disciple who may be noticed next is Manavasi V. Ramaswamy Iyer, who was a P. W. Supervisor at Tiruvannamalai, in March 1908. He had heard of Brahmana Swami on the hill, but found that people differed in their views about him. Anyhow he wished to visit the Swami and went with a companion, a fiddler, and returned,—the fiddler telling him on the way back, that the visit was a waste of time. A month later, he went up with more faith, and wisely without any companion. Swami also was sitting alone in the Virupaksha cave. Ramaswami Iyer gives an account of this interview, thus, in his diary :

"My soul was stirred; and I appealed to him 'Sir, Jesus and other great souls came into the world to redeem sinners. Is there no hope for me?' The Swami was suddenly moved, and he moved from where he was, and said (in English)*

* The words in bracket are not in the original diary but have been added by way of explanation.

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'THERE IS HOPE, YES. THERE IS HOPE.'

"These are the very words. With reluctance I came down, and the composition No. 1 was born.

எதுதுலகாம்போதி.

பல்லவி

திக்கு வேறில்லை-நீயேகதி-ஐயா, மெய்யா, தூயா, உனைவிட

அநுபல்லவி (திக்கு)

மொய்க்குமடியவர் வண்டினமாகியே கண்டு சுவைத்திடும்

செண்டு மணப்பூவே. (திக்கு)

(which means: Thou art my sole refuge, I have naught else to turn to, Oh Sweet and Fragrant Bouquet of Flowers charming to the bees of the devotees swarming to Thy feet.)

"From that I began to frequent him (*i.e.* his Asram). Once again I was with him one night, as it became a habit with me to sleep there every night when at headquarters. He was sitting calm; and after half an hour or so he saw me; and from him came into me a *burning current*.

"Previous to this (or later, I forget) when sitting under a tamarind tree, something entered into me; and I could not explain it then.

"Years later, it was found that the mind entered inside.* Then I felt something else entered into my body, which was very pleasing."

"I was all along a dyspeptic; and I did not digest food, nor wink a sleep. I was worrying myself; and he (Swami) asked about it. I told him my health. My head was hot. In about a minute, my whole brain got a cooling sensation. It so chanced that it was the eighteenth

* The writer seems to mean that his mind got absorbed within itself.

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of Adi of Sowmya. A lady (devotee) brought in cakes and food as a feast. I was living on *Kanji* (gruel). Many invited me and I declined, saying 'I cannot digest.' But he pressed me, and I had a good feast of very hard and rich food. That night,—it was so very strange, I slept profoundly. This was a great impetus to me to rely on him more fully. My people (*i.e.*, wife, etc.), who were averse to my going to the Swami, began to send my food to his presence, seeing my cure. Alas! I did not know him earlier; and I had spent a lot of money on medicines till then! And so the above circumstances gave birth to composition No. 2.

காம்போதி

பல்லவி

பேருதவியை என்னென்று சொல்லலாகும், ஐயநினருள்
அநுபல்லவி தரு (பேரு)
ஆரும் அளி கிளி அணில்மயில் குரங்கிற்கும்
அழையாமலே யிரங்கும் விழைமன நிறைவே நின் (பேரு)

(which means: The great aid graciously bestowed by thee, what am I to say of it? Even on bees, parrots, squirrels, peacocks, monkeys, thou hast showered thy mercy, unsought).

"Swami used to be very kind to these animals, and they were very free with him. Swamiji often gave us to read *Ribhu Gita*; and often *by his mere look*, the soul was stirred. I have heard people being blessed by the Guru holding his palm or feet on the head of the *chela*: but this* is more powerful.

* 'This' evidently refers to the Swami's 'look' at the disciple, the *drishti diksha* (i. e., grace by glance) and not to the giving of Ribhu Gita.

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" Swamiji's Instruction is:

" Everything consists in not forgetting one's self† and all misery is due to the forgetting his self. I have come to the conclusion that when I forget my own self I have gone down; and I am a beast then. But when I am clear, 'I am', no bad nature is there.

" How happy I feel, when once I question 'Who am I,' and come by another stream to the brain. The very act of questioning is using will; and so, the lesser the will-power, the lesser the happiness and *vice versa*. I am sure about this now."†

Again on another date he notes in his diary, how he conceived this process of self-realisation taught by the Swami.

" The most important way to improve the brain is to stop thinking.‡ Thinking and thinking is the cause of heated brain. When the brooding or thinking completely subsides, I am happy. To describe the state of feeling, then, will be vague—I feel 'me' or 'self'—which vanishes as soon as thinking begins."

Such a long extract from his diary has been given here, to enable the reader to form his own idea of how the Swami's *Upadesa* (instruction) works in the field of spiritual experience with various people, as also in matters of mere physical health. The above cure of nervous insomnia and dyspepsia by the use of the will-power or the "I" current (as this disciple frequently terms it) is

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† Perhaps the stanza at the head of this chapter is a more accurate rendering of the instruction.

‡ 'Thinking' *i. e.*, conceptual thought.

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strikingly similar to the case of a lady* who was cured of the same diseases in very similar circumstances by following the advice of a mental healer who told her, that there is nothing but soul or mind, that the body is a myth or a product at any rate of the mind, that by remembering that she was the soul or mind which could not have any disease, she would be at once freed from her physical troubles.

Phenomena like those narrated above were by no means uncommon in the Swami's presence or in relation to him. Flashes of light, visions, apparitions and mental healing, were occasionally thus experienced and reported by disciples to the Swami. The Swami mostly remained silent or gave simple and natural explanations, always adding the advice or warning to the disciple not to be unduly elated by or absorbed in such experiences,—for after all, the grand aim of life is something different—*viz.*, the Self.

Lakshmiammal of Mandakolathur, known at the Ramanasram as Echammal is one of the oldest devotees of the Swami. She had very early in life drained the cup of bitterness to the dregs. Before she was twentyfive she lost her husband, then her only son, and finally her only daughter, in quick succession. Life became unendurable, and "the shocks so rudely given confused" *her* and "stunned *her* from *her* power to think, and all the knowledge of *her* self." Her village home, once so full of happy associations became, for that very reason, a veritable gloomy den which hurt her whichever side she turned, whatever she did or saw. Now "all the place was dark," for, all was dark where *they* were not, and "all the chambers emptied of delight,"—

* This case is found in pp. 100-104 of *Varieties of Religious Experience* by W. James.

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—"because her brood was stolen away." She could not, for instance, open her window, for if she did, she would at once look on the school where her girl passed several happy years of study. Consolations were of no avail. With her father's permission she travelled to Gokarnam in the Bombay Presidency to serve the holy sages of that place—so that, haply by their grace, her sorrows might be assuaged. In the north, she met holy sages, but none of them could take the burden of sorrow off her back.

So in 1906, with a heart still aching, she returned to her village. Then some of her friends and relations seeing that she wished to obtain the grace of great sages, reported to her that on the Tiruvannamalai Hill was a young but holy saint maintaining silence and benefitting many of those that approached him with faith; and that if she but saw him she would never go back. Echammal started at once for Tiruvannamalai. On reaching that place she avoided her relations, as their sight would revive her poignant grief for her lost ones. She went with a friend up the Hill and saw the Swami. The Swami sat quiet and said nothing. She stood for an hour in his presence and said nothing at all. Yet though no words were exchanged—wonder of wonders! she felt transfixed to the spot and could not think of leaving the Asram. Finally she somehow pulled herself back and returned to her friend's house at the foot of the Hill, and informed her that somehow—by the grace of that Swami, the incubus of sorrow had been lifted from her heart.

She repeated her visits to the Asram day after day, and in a few days she could talk of her departed children and recall facts associated with them without being over-whelmed by tears, and without even a bitter pang in her heart.

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How this dense cloud of sorrow, this whirlwind of grief disappeared, and gave place to a comparative calm in her breast, she could not understand. It was all his grace, the kindness of the Swami on the Hill. That was all she knew.

"I revere, I adore, I worship this Swami" was all she could say. Ever since, she daily prepares food for the Swami and his visitors, carries it up to him wherever he may be, and after feeding him and them, reverently eats what remains. She found her Saviour and resolved never to leave him—never to go back to her village or anywhere else. All the moneys her father and, after his death, her brother sent or paid her for the last twenty-nine years, were ungrudgingly devoted to the Swami and his Asram ; she, of her penury, casts in all the living she has ; and her house has been the refuge for many devotees and visitors of the Swami. Her reward has been a deep faith and mental peace. Any good or evil that befalls her, she conveys at once to the Swami who fully appreciates her devotion and sympathises with her as with the other devotees that have made him their sole refuge.

With the Swami's concurrence, Echammal adopted a girl named Sellammal as her foster daughter, got her married, and even rejoiced in the birth of a tiny grandson whom she named "Ramana" after the Swami. But Providence* has always minimised the domestic blessings to this devotee. One day as she sat in her house at Tiruvannamalai, telegraphic news was suddenly conveyed to her from her son-in-

* In accordance with the declaration,

यस्यानुग्रहमिच्छामि तस्य सर्वं हराम्यहम् ।

"whenever I wish to bless any one, everything he calls his I snatch away from him."

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law's village, that Sellammal had died. Not having been informed of her previous illness this sudden stab made her gasp and seemed to reopen the old ocean of sorrow. But times had changed and she had a Saviour now ready at hand. So she ran up to the Swami and handed to him the telegram. As the Swami read it, he wept. "Weep with those who weep. Rejoice with those who rejoice," is not mere book learning with him. Echammal went to attend the funeral and came back with the baby "Ramana," the only pledge of her departed daughter Sellammal, and placed him in the arms of the Swami, as the boy's sole refuge and her own, for ever. Again the Swami burst into tears, realising as he did, how Echammal was still feeling the iron that had entered into her soul. Sorrow shared is sorrow lost. Her hopes having been anchored on the Swami, sorrow did not tear her up and carry her away as the first whirlwind did. The reward of her faith is the ease with which she recovers from shocks, and a subsequent deep mental peace.

As for her spiritual development, she is a firm believer in disinterested service as her sole means of salvation. She was formerly taught by a northern guru, the art of concentration of thought, *i.e.*, parts of Yoga. She even advanced therein so far as to fix her attention on her nose, and to remain for days in the contemplation of the blissful light that appeared before her vision. She would occasionally be in contemplation, for twenty-four hours or more consecutively, oblivious of her body, and absolutely without movement. When these occurrences were reported by others to the Swami he kept quiet. Finally when she herself reported them to him, he dissuaded her from proceeding further with the practice. "Those objective lights you see are not your real goal. You should aim at realising your Self and nothing short of it." She has consequently

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discontinued her blissful Yogic practice and though unable to reach, immediately, the goal set before her she has infinite trust in the power of the Swami to save her and is always thinking of him. Such constant thought of the Swami leads to special spiritual experience—one of which may be set out here.

A Sastri from the North came to Tiruvannamalai to see the Swami. When he was talking with the Swami at the Virupaksha cave, Echammal came up carrying food as usual. Her face however showed much agitation and she was shivering. When asked what the matter was, she narrated what had just then happened. When she was climbing up with the food, she had to pass by the Sadguru-swami cave. As she passed it, it struck her as she was looking down and climbing, that two persons were standing near her path. One of them appeared to be Ramana Maharshi and the other was some stranger. She continued to climb up. As she went up a few steps higher, she heard a voice say "இங்கே இருக்கும்போது மேலே என்னத்துக்குப் போகிறது" which means "When one is (*i.e.*, I am) here, why go further up?" Then she turned to see the place where the figures had stood. But not a soul was there, nor anywhere in the vicinity. This frightened her; and shivering and perspiring, she climbed up to the Swami's Asram. When asked why she was agitated, Echammal gave this explanation; and the Sastri became envious of her. "What, Swami!" said the Sastri "while you profess to talk with me here, you show your form to this lady on the way. To me, you do not deign to show any similar mark of your grace." When thus upbraided with partiality, the Swami had to defend himself; and he explained Echammal's visions as due to her thinking of him constantly.

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Santammal of Ramnad is an elderly widow who heard of Maharshi a few years before, read his life, and began to worship his picture with great faith. She constantly thought of him in her waking moments, and saw him in her dreams. She would go to the Asram at Tiruvannamalai and render service to her Guru by cooking food morning, noon and evening. She began to see flashes of light in front of her eyes, whether closed or open, and the figure of Maharshi also appeared to her transfigured in bright white light even when she was away from Tiruvannamalai. She reported all these to Maharshi who promptly told her not to allow such phenomena to interfere with her main objective, *viz.*, the realisation of the Self. "ஒடுங்கவேண்டும்." "The mind must be stilled" was his insistent advice; and following it up she attained signal success in stilling her mind.

Experiences of this sort are by no means rare among the Swami's devotees who usually concentrate their minds on him; and the Swami gives the same warning, explanation or advice to all. In a few cases, visions of devotees had special significance. Some of them are referred to in this and later chapters.

Raghavachariar, a T. R. S. Supervisor at Tiruvannamalai from 1910, paid occasional visits to the Swami. But whenever he went up, he found with the Swami a crowd in whose presence he felt disinclined to speak to the Swami. One day he went up with intent to submit three questions or requests to the Swami. The questions, and what followed, are best given in Raghavachari's own words.

"The questions are:—

1. Can you grant me a few minutes for private personal talk—free from the presence of others?

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2. I should like to have your opinion of the Theosophical Society of which I am a member.

3. Will you please enable me to see your real form if I am eligible to see it ?

"When I went and prostrated and sat, there was a crowd of thirty persons; but they immediately dispersed. So I was alone with him and my first query was thus answered without my stating it. That struck me as noteworthy.

"Then he asked me of his own accord, if the book in my hand was Gita and if I was a member of the T. S. and remarked even before I answered his queries, 'It is doing good work.' I answered his questions in the affirmative.

"My second question also being thus anticipated, I waited with eager mind for the third. After half an hour, I opened my mouth and said 'Just as Arjuna wished to see the form of Sri Krishna and asked for *Darsan*,* I wish to have a darsan of your real form, if I am eligible'. He was then seated on the *pial* with a picture of Dakshinamurthy painted on the wall next to him. He silently gazed on as usual and I gazed into his eyes. Then his body and also the picture of Dakshinamurthy disappeared from my view. There was only empty space, without even a wall, before my eyes. Then followed a whitish cloud in the outline of the Maharshi and of Dakshinamurthy, formed before my eyes. Gradually the outline (with silvery lines) of these figures appeared. Then eyes, nose, etc., other details were outlined in lightning-like lines. These gradually broadened till the whole figure of the Swami and Dakshinamurthy became ablaze with very strong and un-

* *i. e.*, a view of the Macrocosmic or Universal form of Sri Krishna. See Ch. XI of the Bhagavad Gita.

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endurable light. I closed my eyes in consequence. I waited a few minutes and then saw him and Dakshinamurthy in the usual form. I prostrated and came away. For a month thereafter I did not dare to go near him ; so great was the impression the above experience made on me. After a month, I went up and saw him standing in front of the Skandasram. I told him, 'I had a question put to you a month back, and I had this experience,' narrating the above experience to him. I requested him to explain it. Then after a pause, he said, 'You wanted to see my form. You saw my disappearance. I am formless. So, that experience might be the real truth. The further visions may be according to your own conceptions derived from the study of the Bhagavad Gita. But Ganapati Sastri had a similar experience and you may consult him.' I did not in fact consult Sastri. After this, Maharshi told me to find out who the "I" was—the Seer or Thinker, and his place."

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CHAPTER XVII

F. H. HUMPHREYS AND THE SWAMI

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।
ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्रसमदर्शिनः ॥

"The Yogi by frequently practising concentration of mind sees God (Self) in all beings and all beings in God, and has thus the same or equally proper and appropriate attitude towards all."

Bhag. Gita.

F. H. Humphreys came out to India for the first time in January 1911, to join the Police Department as an Assistant Superintendent. When he reached Bombay he was too ill to move on, and was detained in a hospital for about two months. On recovery, he started off to Vellore to get his training and reached that town on the 18th March 1911. S. Narasimhayya, a Telugu Munshi there, was commissioned to teach him Telugu, and he began the first day with the alphabet. The pupil however evinced interest in things abstruse and asked for a book on astrology. The next day he asked his Munshi, "Do you know any Mahatma here?" People are rather reticent about the persons they revere, and Narasimhayya's answer was in the negative. The very next morning the pupil met the Munshi and said: "Munshi, you said yesterday, you did not know any Mahatma. I saw your Guru this morning in my sleep. He sat by my side. The first man in Vellore whom I met in Bombay was yourself." The Munshi protested that he had never visited Bombay; but the pupil explained that during his stay at the Bombay Hospital, he directed his

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mind to Vellore, and in his astral body saw the figure of the Munshi. The Munshi then placed several photographs of Great Men *(Mahatmas)* before his pupil; and the latter picked out the photograph of Kavyakantha Ganapathi Sastri and told the Munshi, "There is the likeness of your Guru. Is he not your preceptor? Tell me." And the Munshi admitted the fact. The pupil again fell ill before a fortnight was over and went away to Ootacamund for health, and wrote from there that he saw a strange person with bright eyes, matted hair and a long beard, (some *Siddha* perhaps) and that he wished to learn breath regulation *(Pranayama)*. Later, he was considering how far abstinence from flesh-eating would be helpful to meditation, and whether he could join a mystic society, the members of which were privileged to converse with Mahatmas *(Siddhas.)* Humphreys added that in a former birth he was a member of that mystic society.

After returning from Ootacamund, he was introduced to K. K. Ganapati Sastri for whom he conceived great veneration, and was taken by the latter in November 1911 to see Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai, when the Theosophical Conference was holding its sittings there. On this occasion he had the assistance of both K. K. G. Sastri and Munshi S. Narasimhayya to converse with the Maharshi who spoke only broken English. The first question put by this Englishman was characteristic of youthful ambition and altruism.

F. H. Humphreys: Master! Can I help the world?

Ramana Maharshi: Help yourself: and you will help the world.

F. H. H.: I wish to help the world. Shall I not be helpful?

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Maharshi : Yes ! Helping yourself, you help the world. You are in the world. You are the world.

You are not different from the world ; nor is the world different from you.

After a pause,

F. H. H. : Master. Can I perform miracles, as Sri Krishna and Jesus did before ?

Maharshi : Was any of them at the time when he acted, feeling that he was acting, and that he was doing something inconsistent with the laws of nature ?

F. H. H. : (After a while). No, master.

The Master noticing his bent and fearing his yielding to the meretricious charms of Thaumaturgy (Siddhi) showed him that the chief thing was to push on in one's efforts to reach the Highest, the Self through absolute self-surrender —(*Prapatti*), in the spirit which cries out.

> " Our wills are ours, we know not how,
> Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

The pupil felt the magnetic attraction of Maharshi and paid him two more visits. In the second visit he had motored on his bicycle all the sixty miles of the dusty road from Vellore under a hot sun. Raghavachariar, the P. W. Superintendent, took him up to the Maharshi's cave. This time the late A. S. Krishnaswami Aiyar (then a District Munsiff), who happened to be present, acted as the interpreter. F. H. Humphreys feared a conflict between his official duty and his spiritual practice, aud questioned Maharshi about it.

F. H. Humphreys : Master ! Lessons pass away quickly from my memory, I remember only the last word. What should I do ?

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Maharshi : You can attend to your duty and to your meditation.

Of the third visit which followed soon after, F. H. Humphreys has given no account, but presumably the teaching he derived from Maharshi which is set out, includes what he heard during his three visits.

F. H. Humphreys wrote an account of his visits and of the teachings to a lady in England, who published them in the International Psychic Gazette.

F. H. Humphreys retired from service some years later and became a Roman Catholic monk.

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CHAPTER XVIII

INSTRUCTIONS TO F. H. HUMPHREYS

विश्वंदर्पणदृश्यमाननगरीतुल्यं निजान्तर्गतं
पश्यन्नात्मनि मायया बहिरिवोद्भूतं यथा निद्रया ।
यस्साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्वयं
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

Salutation to the feet of the Guru Sri Dakshinamurti, who sees within himself the entire universe, which resembles the image of a city in a mirror, which appears to be outside of him just as objects seen in a dream are outside the dreamer, but which merges into himself in the state of Realisation—for then he sees the Self alone, just as the awakened dreamer sees himself alone and not the objects he dreamt of.

A master is one who has meditated solely on God, has flung his whole personality into the sea of God, and drowned and forgotten it there, till he becomes only the instrument of God, and when his mouth opens it speaks God's words without effort or forethought ; and when he raises a hand, God flows again through that, to work a miracle.

Do not think too much of psychical phenomena and such things. Their number is legion ; and once faith in the psychical thing is established in the heart of a seeker, such phenomena have done their work. Clairvoyance, clairaudience, and such things are not worth having, when so much far greater illumination and peace are possible without them than with them. The Master takes on these powers as a form of SELF-SACRIFICE !

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The idea that a master is simply one who has attained power over the various occult senses by long practice and prayer or anything of the kind, is absolutely false. No Master ever cared a rap for occult powers, for he has no need for them in his daily life.

The phenomena we see, are curious and surprising—but the most marvellous of all we do not realise and that is that *one*, and only one, illimitable force is responsible for :—

(*a*) All the phenomena we see ; and
(*b*) The *act* of seeing them.

Do not fix your attention on all these changing things of life, death and phenomena. Do not think of even the actual act of seeing or perceiving them, but only of that which sees all these things—THAT WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE for it all. This will seem nearly impossible at first, but by degrees the result will be felt. It takes years of steady, daily practice, and that is how a master is made. Give a quarter of an hour a day for this practice. Try to keep the mind unshakenly fixed on That which Sees. It is inside yourself. Do not expect to find that "That" is something DEFINITE on which the mind can be fixed easily : it will not be so. Though it takes years to find that "That", the results of this concentration will be seen in four or five months' time—in all sorts of UNCONSCIOUS clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round, yet always unconscious power.

I have given you this teaching in the words same as the Master gives to intimate *chelas*. From now onwards, let your whole thought in meditation be not on the act of seeing, nor on what you see, but immovably on That which Sees.

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Attainment

One gets no reward of Attainment. Then one understands that one does not *want* a reward. As Krishna says:— " Ye have the right to work, but not to the fruits thereof." Perfect attainment is simply worship, and worship is attainment.

If you sit down and realise that you think only by virtue of the one Life, and that the mind, animated by the one Life into the act of thinking is a part of the whole which is God, then you argue your mind out of existence as a separate entity ; and the result is that mind and body physically (so to speak) disappear ; and the only thing that remains is Be-ing, which is at once existence and non-existence and not explainable in words or ideas.

A Master cannot help being perpetually in this state with only this difference, that in some, to us, incomprehensible way, he can use the mind, body, and intellect too, without falling back into the delusion of having separate consciousness.

Religion

It is useless to speculate, useless to try and take a mental or intellectual grasp and work from that. That is only religion, a code for children and for social life, a guide to help us to avoid shocks, so that the inside fire may burn up the nonsense in us, and teach us, a little sooner, common sense, *i.e.*, a knowledge of the delusion of separateness.

Religion, whether it be Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Theosophy, or any other kind of "Ism" or "Sophy" or system, can only take us to the one point where all religions meet and no further.

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God

That one point where all religions meet is the realisation—in no mystical sense, but in the most worldly and everyday sense, and the more worldly and everyday and practical the better,—of the fact that GOD IS EVERY THING, AND EVERY THING IS GOD.

From this point begins the work of the practice of this mental comprehension, and all it amounts to is the breaking of a habit. One has to cease calling things "things," and must call them God; and instead of thinking them to be things, must know them to be God; instead of imagining "existence" to be the only thing possible, must realise that, this (phenomenal) existence is only the creation of the mind, that "non-existence" is a necessary sequence if you are going to postulate "existence."

The knowledge of things only shows the existence of an organ to cognize. There are no sounds to the deaf, no sights for the blind, and the mind is merely an organ of conception or of appreciation of certain sides of God.

God is infinite, and therefore existence and non-existence are merely His counterparts. Not that I wish to say that God is made up of DEFINITE component parts. It is hard to be comprehensive when talking of God. True knowledge comes from within and not from without. And true knowledge is not "knowing" but "seeing."

Realisation

Realisation is nothing but seeing God literally. Our greatest mistake is that we think of God as acting symbolically and allegorically, instead of practically and literally.

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Take a piece of glass, paint colours and forms on it, and put the same into a magic lantern, turn on a little light, and the colours and the forms painted on the glass are reproduced on the screen. If that light were not turned on, you would not see the colours of the slide on the screen.

How are colours formed? By breaking up white light with a many-sided prism. So it is with a man's character. It is seen when the Light of Life (God) is shining through it, *i.e.*, in a man's actions. If the man is sleeping or dead, you do not see his character. Only when the Light of Life is animating the character, and causing it to act in thousand different ways, in response to its contact with this many-sided world, can you perceive a man's character. If white light had not been broken up and put into forms and shapes on our magic lantern slide, we should never have known that there was a piece of glass in front of the light, for the light would have shone clearly through. In a sense, that white light was marred, and had some of its clearness taken from it by having to shine through the colours on the glass.

So it is with an ordinary man. His mind is like the screen. On it shines light, dulled and changed because he has allowed the many-sided world to stand in the way of the Light (God) and break it up. He sees only the effects of the Light (God) instead of the Light (God) Himself, and his mind reflects the effects he sees just as the screen reflects the colours on the glass. Take away the prism and the colours vanish, absorbed back into the white light from whence they came. Take away the colours from the slide and the light shines clearly through. Take away from our sight the world of effects we see, and let us look only into the causes, and we shall see the Light (God).

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A Master in meditation, though the eyes and ears be open, fixes his attention so firmly on "That Which Sees" that he neither sees nor hears, nor has any physical consciousness at all—nor mental either, but only spiritual.

We must take away the world, which causes our doubts, which clouds our mind, and the light of God will shine clearly through. How is the world taken away? When, for example, instead of seeing a man you see and say, "This is God animating a body," which body answers, more or less perfectly, to the directions of God, as a ship answers more or less perfectly to her helm.

Sins

What are sins? Why, for example, does a man drink too much? Because he hates the idea of being bound—bound by the incapacity to drink as much as he wishes. He is striving after liberty in every sin he commits. This striving after liberty is the first instinctive action of God in a man's mind. For God knows that he is not bound. Drinking too much does not give a man liberty, but then the man does not know that he is really seeking liberty. When he realises that, he sets about seeking the best way to obtain liberty.

But the man only gains that liberty when he realises that he was never bound. The I, I, I's who feel so bound are really the illimitable Spirit. I am bound because I know nothing that I do not sense by one of the senses. Whereas I am all the time that which senses in every body, in every mind. These bodies and minds are only the tools of the "I," the illimitable Spirit.

What do I want with the tools who am the tools themselves, as the colours are the White Light?

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Jesus, the man, was utterly unconscious* when he worked his miracles and spoke his wonderful words. It was White Light, the Life, which is the cause and effect, acting in perfect concert. "My father and I are one." Give up the idea of "I" and "Mine." Can the body possess anything? Can the mind possess anything? Lifeless tools are both, unless the Light of God be shining through. These things which we see and sense, are only the split-up colours of the One Illimitable Spirit.

Worship

How can you best worship God? Why, by not trying to worship him (but) by giving up your WHOLE SELF to Him and showing that every thought, every action, is only a working of that one Life (God)—more or less perfect according as it is conscious or unconscious.*

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* *i.e.*, 'unconscious of being a separate finite personality.'

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CHAPTER XIX

ANNOYANCES FROM "SADHUS"

"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.

Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Almost from the time of his arrival, "Brahmana Swami" struck pious people as a man of high realisation. Stanzas 95 to 98 of Kaivalya Navanitham describing a *jivanmukta* are well-known.

These stanzas make prominent mention of their assurance, altruism or beneficence towards all, rectitude, freedom from passions of love, hate, envy, etc., detachment, humility, despite deep wisdom; readiness to turn to any duty, in any status, whether it be a hermit's, a merchant's, a ruler's or a beggar's; and through indifference as to what has happened in the past and what may happen in the future, as to what comes up as food, or to comfort and discomfort; equanimity maintained even if heavens fall or the sun turns pale or a dead man rises up from the grave; and impartial or unconcerned witnessing of all that occurs.

The consequent increase in the number of those who admired or revered the Swami, has already been noted. This produced no envy in others so long as he sat in silent absorption and did not move socially with others. When however, after he came up the Hill, he began to answer questions and his following increased and included men of position, wealth and education, the green-eyed monster in-

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vaded the hearts of some "sadhus," especially those living on the Hill. They could maintain their self-complacency so long as all the "sadhus" they met or dealt with, were like themselves—full of professions of virtue and spirituality, corresponding however very little with their real character. But to meet one who reversed their method, professed nothing, but dared actually to live up to the counsel of perfection prescribed in the books for ascetics,—that was quite exasperating. Besides, there was another, and in their view a more serious grievance rankling in their breasts. The new Swami was unconsciously depriving them of the income they derived and the respect they commanded from the public. When the new sun of selflessness rose in the horizon, few cared to look at the pale moon of external asceticism still lingering in the sky for a good while. Persons who had formerly poured their presents at the feet of other sadhus on the Hill, did not care to visit them again; and even fresh visitors to the town mostly went to the new Swami with their offerings (the more persistently because he did not care for any offerings) leaving some of the older sadhus to cry unto each other, "Perceive ye, how ye prevail nothing; the world is gone after him." Two such "Sadhus" who are now dead, may first be noticed here, on account of the serious turn their envy took. But whatever their failings, we must not speak ill of the dead (nor of the living for that matter), and therefore, their names are not given here. Instead, they will be referred to merely by some letter or letters for purposes of reference in this book. Both of them had great respect for the Swami when he was at Gurumurtam; and one of them had told his attendant to bring the Swami up the Hill, so that his feet may be formally and solemnly bathed and worshiped (*i.e.*, in the performance of his *Padapooja*). At that time the Swami was not

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on the Hill and no loss of income was apprehended. We will begin first with that sadhu, M. J. P.

M. J. P. was at the outset performing strict Tapas on the Hill, eating very little, and strictly adhering to *Brahmacharya* (sex abstinence). When the Swami went up the Hill he would often visit M. J. P., would sit with him and render occasional but silent help. But when the Swami's following steadily increased and that of the other steadily diminished, he wished the new comer off. He had previously frightened away some sadhus by the "stone-rolling device," which he played upon this Swami also. When the latter was seated alone on the hill-slope at dusk or at night, M. J. P. would stealthily go higher up and roll down massive stones from above. One such stone came very near the Swami. The latter was not however afraid. He quietly watched the tricks and on one occasion climbed up quickly and caught M. J. P. in the very act. The old man unabashed tried to laugh it away as a joke. The Swami bore him no ill-will however. But M. J. P. did not stop with this. He and his friend—the *sadhu* next to be mentioned—seriously planned a campaign to drive away the young Swami from Tiruvannamalai. The details of that campaign and its failure will be immediately described as part of the heroic achievement of the next *sadhu* whom we may label for the purposes of this narrative "M. B."

M. B. was an interesting and prominent character, of Brahmin birth, with a fairly good education, and some familiarity with parts of the Vedas, the Gita, the Brahma Sutras and a little knowledge of English, French, Mahratti, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam and other languages. He was able to create a good impression on most people at the very first encounter by his smooth rounded

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outlines, fair complexion, studied dress, land superior airs. He knew how to suit himself to the prince and the peasant, the cultured and the uncultured, the young and the old, the cautious and the gullible. When he came to the Swami at Gurumurtam, the latter was found mostly with eyes closed, and M. B. did not enter into any relations with him. But when the young Swami was attracting the people unto himself on the Hill, being himself ignored, nay drowned in oblivion, M.B. was not the sort of man to sink without a struggle. He knew his own resourcefulness and worldly wisdom and the absence of both in his "opponent." So he began with the "confidence trick" with infinite brass. M. B. often walked into the young Swami's quarter, and posed as his *guru*. When new-comers came in, M. B. would tell them "Yes, give the child sweets", and address the young and silent Swami, "Child, Venkatarama, take the sweets." He would keep up appearances by purchasing and presenting eatables to him saying, "Child, here are sweetmeats for you." He would also tell visitors—"This young Swami is my disciple, my protege. Honour him, etc."

The young Swami saw through the game from the very outset. But "Resist not evil" was his guiding principle. Besides he had a contempt for wealth and esteem which M. B. was aiming to get, at his expense. Sometimes M. B. would blandly tell him, "I will say to the visitors that you are my disciple and make some money. It is no loss to you. So, do not contradict me." The *mouni*, in any case, kept quiet on account of his rule of silence. The disciples and admirers of the young Swami (for by 1908, when this occurred, he had many of them) did not maintain the same attitude as the Swami, towards this conduct of M. B. They were resenting it, —silently at first, but very expressively later.

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M.B. had comic ways of showing off his superiority. One day he would go to the young Swami's cave and call to some one present—"Here boy, take this money out of my cloth or coat. I cannot touch silver with my hand. Some one has showered a hundred rupees on me." He would lavishly spend the money he got and endeavour to get more, by filling people whom he met with all sorts of hopes. " Oh, you have lost your appointment ; you will regain it, be sure !" " Oh ! I tell you that by the third week of such and such a month, something very satisfactory may be looked for," he would say. In lieu of these liberal and airy promises he would get substantial sums, food, clothes, etc., from gullible people. He knew to play numerous parts, and would go to the Swami and brag about his exploits. One day he turned up at the Virupaksha cave and said "Do you know what I have done ? I have latterly been *Avadhuta*, (stark-naked). In rich houses, I have sat and played all sorts of tricks like a new born babe, and dirtied the floor in the middle of the living apartments, and rich ladies have served, and attended on, me." Unfortunately for M. B., he did not stop with playing these childish pranks on the gullible persons in the plains. He took it into his head the same night to dirty the verandah of the Virupaksha cave. When M. B. had gone away early in the morning, leaving his clothes in the cave, the Swami woke up, noticed the stench, and inferred M. B.'s misconduct, but kept quiet. His disciple Palaniswamy however noticed it with different feelings. Anyhow, he fetched water and cleaned the place. He had discovered that his master did not relish M. B.'s conduct. When he was starting out with his master to go to a distant tank, he removed M.B.'s clothes from the cave, threw them out, locked up the cave, and went away with his master.

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M. B. returned some time later and noticed his clothes—even the silk and lace bordered clothes !—thrown unceremoniously out. Highly incensed at this, he stormed and raged. This must be the work of Palaniswamy, he felt sure. As soon as the Malayali returned, he vented his ire upon him, even beat him and conceived a double trick to separate the young Swami from his supporters, to subject the former to his own will and pleasure or (in case he disliked it) to make him quit Tiruvannamalai. So he told the Swami in a tone of authority " Send away this Palaniswamy. He to throw out my clothes ! He must not stop here a moment longer." Palaniswamy did not move and the swami also remained quiet. Then in his anger, M. B. spat on the Swami, who with remarkable endurance, *Titiksha*, put up with it and kept quiet. His disciples, then present, did not resent M.B.'s conduct either. But the young Swami had many more admirers, and when the news reached them, they did not exhibit the same equanimity. One Muthayyaswamy from the cave next below, came up and approaching M. B. cried out " *You* ! *you* dare to spit on our Swami ! I shall give you what you deserve," and was evidently proceeding to give that elderly person (who was then past forty years) some corporal punishment. But by the intervention of others, M.B. escaped what he so richly deserved. M. B.'s further stay on the Hill exposed him to the risk of coming across more of the young Swami's admirers of the aggressive type ; and finding discretion the better part of valour, he made himself scarce. He bolted away saying the Hill was not " a proper place." He went to the railway station and got into a second-class compartment (without a ticket) where a young gentleman and a young lady were seated. There he began to hector the young man, and called on him to do one thing and another. The

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young man took no notice of this rudeness; and then M. B. rose to the height of his recklessness by rebuking him in these terms. "You do not listen to me! It is your infatuation for this lassie (ஸ்ரீ முக்தி) that makes you not to show me due respect." The young man at once seized a shoe and showed his due respect by using it on the superior person of M.B.

M. B. returned to Tiruvannamalai after a year or two, went to the foot of a *bilva* (bel) tree near the mango-tree cave, and sent for the Swami. The latter, thinking probably that the man might have been reformed, went to see him. There when none else was present, M. B. asked him. "Do you know what happened to me at the railway station?"

B. S. :—Yes.

M. B. "You see. All that experience is necessary."

Few people would miss the chance of chiming in with a "yes, certainly. But was it enough?" But the Swami with his principle of *ahimsa*, harmlessness in thought, word and act, did not say that or anything that might hurt M. B.'s feelings.

M. B. then proceeded to offer the *amende honorable* in his own quaint way. He said "You see, I was wrong in spitting upon you. I did so in anger. Now I have come back. You can spit on me in return as often as you please." Of course, the young Swami did not spit on him, as he did not harbour any desire for revenge, and it gave him no pleasure to spit on any. The young Swami no doubt thought M. B. had repented and changed. But M. B. soon disabused him of such an impression. He went again to the young Swami's cave ordering about all his disciples and admirers—even educated and cultured people like Pandit Vasudeva Sastri, the Overseer and Rangaswamy

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Ayyangar, the Agent of Best & Co. These would not bow —though the young Swami generally bowed, to the masterfulness of M. B. He came up one morning, to the mango-tree cave, and said to the young Swami "Child, I will initiate you into Nirvikalpa Samadhi," and seizing the latter's hand made him sit along with him on a verandah and gaze into his (M. B.'s) eyes. As for Vasudeva Sastri and others, M. B. looked at them and said "*You, you* have all no further business here. Here, where great souls 'ஞானி ஞானிகள்'—M. B. meant by this term only himself—are, you have nothing to do. So all of you may go." He then asked the Brahmana swamy to look into his eyes and not breathe with effort. He would remark often, "There, there you are holding your breath, why do you do like that? Stop doing so." No one obeyed him but the Swami. M. B. held the Swami for half-an-hour, and himself fell asleep. Then the young Swami and his disciples went away to Virupaksha cave, thinking that they had a good riddance of M. B. for the time being.

M. B. however pestered the young Swami repeatedly with his insolence, impertinence, and insufferable behaviour towards his disciples and supporters. So the young Swami was making up his mind that he must send away his disciples to the town and himself go away to the adjoining reserved forest as other envious 'Sadhus' also were saying—"What right has this Swami to live on the Hill? Is he a *Jnani*, a self-realiser?" When the prospect was looking so dark, suddenly Yoganandaswamy, a very old Swami of real merit (the Master or Guru of M. J. P.) turned up. He held Brahmana Swami in great esteem and invited him to go with him to M. J. P.'s quarters. Getting the support of such a towering personality as Yogananda, against whose wishes M. J. P. and M. B. dared not go, the young Swami

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felt that Providence had sent him relief and gave up the idea of retiring to the forest. M. B. however tried once more to see if he could hector the young Swami and his disciples. He told Rangaswamy Ayyangar one day to fetch a small stick for a tooth brush. R. brought him a huge branch and said "You are a big man; so I brought this big stick for your tooth brush." M. B. used to smoke, and wanted another disciple of the Swami to get him a light for his cigar or pipe. That disciple brought huge burning embers near his face and asked, "What shall I light with this?" Seeing that "non-resistance" was perceptibly diminishing and that self-assertion was on the increase with the Swami's disciples, he said that the hill was no longer a fit place for his stay; but before going to the plains, he professed to curse the Swami, to withdraw from him his powers, the "*Sakti*", which gave him esteem in the eyes of poeple, and declared that the young Swami would command no more respect from people. The Swami's equanimity, however, remained unaffected. When M. B. went to a sweet-meat shop in the town and boasted of the curse, the shop-keeper, who held the young Swami in high respect, roughly handled M. B., who consequently left Tiruvannamalai once again. But M. B. was indefatigable,—quite like Robert Bruce or Muhammad of Gazni, and was intent on further expeditions. He returned to the attack some time later, and behaved indecently in the young Swami's presence and humiliated his attendant. However disgusted the others were, the young Swami remained calm and unruffled. With this exploit, M. B. passed away from Tiruvannamalai and was never seen or heard of again.

Another "sadhu," whose conduct towards Brahmanaswami was unsatisfactory also, had a very long name, too long to be written or pronounced easily, and as it is our

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desire not to ridicule or irritate any one, no name is given. He may be here referred to as S. S. He had a severe training in *Mantrajapa* and had some acquaintance with bits of Upanishadic lore, and much greater proficiency in music. He thought poorly of the young Brahmana swami who evidently did not know *mantras* or music, but who by some stroke of good luck and the ignorance of common folk, attracted a large clientele to himself, without understanding how to utilise his opportunity to collect a good fund, a fund which might accomplish several laudable purposes. On one occasion, returning to Tiruvannamalai from Kalahasti, he said to the Swami, "I have come all this distance simply to see how you are getting on. I shall instruct you in Dattatreya mantra."

The Brahmanaswami did not jump at the offer. He seemed rather quite cold over it, and made no response. Then S. S. said to him "God appeared to me in a dream and commissioned me to give you this *Upadesa*." "Well then," replied the Swami, "let God appear to me also and tell me to take the *Upadesa*, and give me an inclination that way. Then I will take it." "No, it is very short; just a few letters; you may begin," insisted S. S. "What use will your *Upadesa* be to me, unless I go on with the *japa*? I have no mind to take it now," replied the Swami. Chagrined at this discomfiture, S. S. left him, but never lost an opportunity to impress on those who came up to see him and the Swami, that there was nothing in the latter, worth a visit, nothing to be learnt; nothing, for instance, which would enable one to ascend to all the heavens and behold the glories of the highest gods as "S. S. had done." The Swami learnt of these attacks but never cared either for the attacks or for the privilege of obtaining *mantras* that could lead one to behold those glories. Some

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time later, when S. S. was in meditation the figure of the Swami appeared before him suddenly, and said "ஏமாந்து ஏமாறாதே", *i.e.*, "Don't be duped" and disappeared. This caused S. S. considerable agitation. He was forcibly impressed with the idea that the Swami whom he had improperly treated had miraculous power (*siddhi*) and should not be trifled with. So he ran to the latter and mentioning the above fact, craved forgiveness and freedom from the apparition. The Swami disclaimed any miracle-working power (*siddhi*), but showed S. S. clearly that there was no bitterness or grievance against him in his heart.

S. S. would sometimes take away from the post, letters addressed to "Brahmana Swami on the Hill," even though he had no connection at all with the sender, and send replies to the sender—for "was he (S. S.) not a Brahmin and a Swami on the Hill?" These pinpricks, the young Swami did not mind. His heart was not set on worldly objects.

Some eighteen years ago, an attempt was made by some drunken *sadhus* to take away the Swami from Tiruvannamalai. They dropped one day in the Virupaksha cave and solemnly informed the Swami, "We are sadhus from Podikai Hill, the sacred hill in which the ancient Agastya Rishi is still doing *Tapas*, as he has done for thousands of years. He has ordered us to take you first to the Siddhas' Conference at Srirangam and thence to Podikai, to give you regular *Diksha*, (initiation) after extracting those salts from your body which prevent the attainment of higher powers."

The position was evidently serious. The Swami, with his usual equanimity, maintained silence and awaited developments. Meanwhile, a strong and resourceful devotee of his, Perumalswami, hit upon a remedy. Accosting the

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newcomers, Perumalswami said, "We have already received intimation of your visit and we have been commissioned to place your bodies in crucibles and place the crucibles over the fire. What do you say?" and he also told a fellow-disciple Mastan, "Go and dig a deep pit for preparing the fire for these people." When Perumalswami thus out-heroded herod, the visitors were dumb-founded and promptly retreated.

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CHAPTER XX

WITH RELATIVES AGAIN

का ते कान्ता कस्ते पुत्रः
संसारोय मतीव विचित्रः ।
कस्यत्वं कः कुत आयातः
तत्त्वं चिंतय तदिदं भ्रान्तः ॥

Who is a wife for you or a son? This World (*Samsara*) is exceedingly strange. Whose (son, etc.), are you? Who are you? And Whence? Bethink yourself, of the Truth, the Reality in all this.

Sri Sankaracharya's Mohamudgara.

पतिसुतान्वयभ्रातृबान्धवा
नतिविलङ्घ्य तेन्त्यच्युतागताः ।
गतिविदस्तवोद्गीतमोहिताः
कितवयोषितः कस्त्यजेन्निशि ॥

We (Gopi devotees) have come to you O Krishna, brushing aside our husbands, children, brothers and other kinsmen for we knew your track and were charmed by your sublime strains. Deceiver, who will desert women in the dark?

Gopika Gita in Srimad Bhagavata.

Ascetic sentiments like the above, proclaiming the hollowness of family and social ties, abound in religious and philosophic literature, especially in India. One also finds therein references to the importance of love and other altruistic sentiments, for social and individual progress, and to the aspect of duty. Are these teachings mutually conflicting, or is there any way of reconciling them? Lives of great souls like Lord Buddha and Sri

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Krishna Chaitanya (Lord Gauranga) of olden days—as also the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi and other saints of these days, prove that all these teachings are true, and that each has to be specially remembered and applied at the appropriate stage. When the young plant is just sprouting out of the seed or is yet weak and tender, it requires seclusion and the protection of a strong thorn fence to keep off cattle, that else might devour it or trample upon and destroy it. But the same shoot, when developed into a good sized tree, dispenses with such protection and itself affords umbrage, sustenance and protection to cattle and men, without any detriment to itself. Often it is seen that a young aspirant compelled perpetually to stay with his kinsmen, and old friends, makes no progress at all, as they mock at all spirituality and as their influence is totally chill and blighting. He must then get away from his former associations and seek an environment favourable to spiritual growth, *e.g.*, the company of holy men, the joining of a sacred order, residence in an inspiring place far off from his old haunts and among men whose views, ways and habits are elevating and unworldly. When he has sufficiently matured his detachment *(Vairagya)*, when his faith in things unseen is strong enough to withstand all shocks from contact of the world, when his habits of thought and behaviour have become mature and firm, then he can safely move with his old companions, and return to his former haunts. That will be the stage when his nature can and will run its onward course along the paths of love and social duty, and exhibit specially the virtues of **सर्वसमत्वं, सर्वहितत्वं** and **समचित्तत्वं,** *i.e.*, equality, universal beneficence and mental equipoise, which are said to be the chief distinguishing marks of an illuminated person *(Jnani)*.

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Soon after Nagaswami returned from Tiruvannamalai in 1900, he died. Nagasundaram, the younger brother of the Swami, had then little experience in matters spiritual or worldly. He was in his youth subject to fits but was relieved of them by God's grace as years passed. He had the rudiments of faith in Iswara, but had not made much progress beyond that. He was engaged later as a clerk in a temple. About 1902 he came up to see the Swami who was then at the lower cave known as Sadguruswami cave, still keeping up his rule of silence. Nagasundaram embraced the Swami and wept aloud. The Swami was smiling all the while. The junior stayed awhile at the Asram and found that the Swami was above the ties of relationship. Nagasundaram then offered to stay with the Swami, to serve and help him. The latter did not agree: and Nagasundaram went back to his place.

In succeeding years, Alagammal, the Swami's mother and other relations occasionally came to visit the Swami. Once when she was on a pilgrimage to Benares, she visited her son. Again at the beginning of 1914 she went up to the shrine of Venkatramanaswami at Tirupati and on her way back, she halted at Tiruvannamalai, and stayed sometime with the Swami at the Virupaksha cave. Here she fell ill (of typhoid fever perhaps) and for two or three weeks was undergoing great suffering. The Swami does not mind any illness of his own, but is invariably kind and attentive to all others suffering, among his disciples or visitors. In the case of his mother, he had a double debt to pay, *viz.*, the debt he owed to all as a unit of society, and the obligation to repay her for all her kind attention to him in his earlier years. He attended on her with exemplary patience and diligence. In the course of the fever, as fresh symptoms

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manifested themselves giving room for anxiety, he turned to his Tamil muse and composed some stanzas. *

1. Hill of my refuge, that cures the ills of recurring births! O Lord! It is for you to cure my mother's fever.

2. O God that smitest Death itself! My sole refuge! Vouchsafe Thy grace unto my mother and shield her from Death. Who is Death, if scrutinised?

3. Arunachala! Thou blazing fire of Wisdom! Deign to wrap my mother in thy light and make her one with Thee. What need then, for cremation?

4. Arunachala, that chasest away Illusion (Maya)! Why delayest Thou to dispel my mother's delirium! Beside Thee, is there any one that, with maternal solicitude casts an ægis over the suppliant soul and wards off the blows of Destiny?

Alagammal recovered in due course and left Tiruvannamalai for Manamadura. There her domestic circumstances were not satisfactory. The family house at Tiruchuzhi had been sold away to meet debts and necessary expenses. Her brother-in-law Nelliappier also passed away leaving the joint family in anything but affluence. About 1915 Nagasundaram's wife died leaving a little son. Alagammal, now fairly old and helpless, felt that she would be better off with her elder son, the Swami. His reputation was established and his large set of admirers brought in offerings with which many of his dependants were being fed. In the beginning of 1916, Alagammal went up to Tiruvannamalai, and lived for some days with Echammal. She desired to

* The stanzas are in the Appendix.

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make her son's asram her own abode. In this, she first encountered some opposition. Some of the devotees of the Swami feared that even the presence of his close relations in the town would make him run away from their neighbourhood, as he did in 1896. The overseer G. Seshayya entertained such fear and communicated it to the old lady who was greatly agitated thereby. He forgot however that 1916 was not 1896. The position and circumstances of the Swami had entirely changed within those twenty years. And the maintenance of an aged and helpless mother may be a duty devolving even on a hermit. Encouraged by such considerations, Alagammal continued to stay in the town and in a very short time made Virupaksha and the Skandasram, to which the Swami moved soon after her arrival, her own permanent residence.

Nagasundaramier, the Swami's younger brother, soon arrived in the wake of his mother. That aged lady desired to have him also by her side in the closing period of her life, and sent an ardent devotee Narayana Reddiar to fetch him. So Nagasundaram joined his brother's asram. At first he went to the town and begged food. But the abundant supplies of food at the Asram rendered his begging needless. He became one of the devotees of his brother and in due time donned *Kashayam* (*i.e.*, ochre-colored robes) and changed his name into Niranjanananda Swami. Alagammal, soon after her arrival at the Asram. daily cooked food for herself, her sons and visitors; and this practice of cooking food at the Asram, then begun, continues up to this day. It is no doubt consistent with the life of a Rishi to have a kitchen but the ways of rishis have long been forgotten in the south, and this practice is more often identified with family life (*Grihastasrama*). Seshadriswami, with mild humour, once told a person who

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wished to go and see Ramanaswami, " Yes, go and see. There is a householder (*grihasta*) there. You will get sweet cakes (*laddu*) there." The point of the humour lies in the fact that the Swami was situated exactly like a *Grihasta*, with a house, with relations, regular cooking etc. But all this was only in appearance. Maharshi was really little attached to these external objects—however trying their proximity might be. To the really strong man, each fresh obstacle furnishes only a fresh opportunity for overcoming it and strengthens his power of resistance. Alagammal was still apt to fancy that she had special attachment to her son, and that he owed her special attachment in return. To dispel this idea from all minds he at first adopted special measures. For example, when Alagammal talked to him, he would not reply, though he would talk to Echammal and others. Alagammal complained of this treatment. Maharshi then told her that all women were mothers to him—not she only. Alagammal for a time did not see the correctness of this attitude. The fact was that Maharshi was carrying out the very hard but important duty of removing worldly delusions from his mother and educating her in impartiality, detachment etc., *i.e.*, in one word, spirituality. The old lady had some of the rudiments of religion, had gone to Benares and other holy places, and had got by heart with immense trouble the Sanskrit slokas of Dakshinamoorthi Ashtakam and a few Tamil Vedantic poems. This was all her religious education. During the six years she spent with her son (1916-1922), she however picked up (by keeping company with him and others visiting the Asram, by listening to his conversation and watching his conduct), all the important truths which Maharshi generally imparts to his devotees to enable them to attain salvation. She thus began to see

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things in a new light. She assumed the *Kashaya* robe and was dispassionately performing the rites of hospitality at the Asram. By a course of good works, the old tendencies (*vasanas*) were gradually being removed. Then for two or three years towards her end, she had attacks of illness—which also gave her increased strength of mind and prepared her for parting with life with ease. The Swami attended on her constantly with remarkable devotion—often losing his sleep and comfort at night, right up to her end.

It was in Vykasi of Dundubhi corresponding to May, 1922, that Alagammal's illness became serious. Medicines were administered. Attention was bestowed. The Swami was constantly at her bedside. On Vysakha-bahula Navami, the end appeared to be nearing. Whatever the Swami and his disciples could do had been done. Now Nature was taking her own course, and human effort had nothing more left to achieve. So Maharshi, a master-hand at passive endurance, with stoic reliance on the Doctrine of Karma,* was still performing his last offices, fully conscious that nothing could save the life that reached its fated term. His only duty now was to soothe the mother's breast, and give her such spiritual aid as her unconscious closing hours would permit her to receive. His right hand was on her heaving breast (heaving with *Urdhva Svasa*, the violent gasps that betoken the close of life) and his left was on her head. To give her thoughts the proper turn, there was loud *Ramanama Japa*, *i.e.*, God's name was being uttered by a group of disciples for some hours. Parts of Vedas etc., were recited by some.

* Cf. P. 65, *supra*, where he had preached resignation to Fate, to his mother.

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In the midst of such holy recitals, Alagammal left her body at about 8 P.M. on *Navami* (19th May, 1922).

During the day, as death appeared to be near, Maharshi and a few others did not care to eat their day's meal. Just as the shades of evening were falling, a meal had been prepared and the Swami, though invited, did not go in for his meal but asked others to take theirs. When at night the mother's spirit left its earthly tabernacle the Swami rose up and, with a voice free from pain, said "Hereafter we can eat. Come on. There is no pollution." He then took his meal along with some others.

The Swami seemed to feel no pain at all at the death of his mother; his feeling on the other hand seemed to be one of relief. This is what the disciple Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer notes in his diary :—

"Swamiji felt now so very jolly : and all the night the brothers were singing (holy songs). Probably the mother's care was a heavy bond, and as she departed, he felt more free. No need to stop at a fixed place. No need for being helped by others. No care. Free as a bird, let off from a cage. I may be wrong. But I felt it to be so."

The idea of rejoicing at a mother's death on such grounds may jar upon some sensitive minds. So it is needful to observe that grief at, and fear of, death go together and are alike based upon a vague apprehension of harm upon one's entry into what the poet describes as "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns"—harm, by reason of which "Some pious drops the closing eye requires."

If once people in general—and spiritual aspirants in particular—develop the habit of seeing and speaking of things as they really are, so much the better for them from

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the standpoint of truth. They have soaked themselves for years in delusion, and have judged only by appearances. They should lose no time, in beginning the new habit of tearing away the veil of false appearances and seeing the naked truth, face to face.

Maharshi started that habit long ago,—thirty-nine years ago. To him death became a mere trifle, a mere वाचारंभणं नामधेयं—a mere name, a mere matter of form. What is death but a change of form, which calls for a fresh name? But as for the substance, does that change?

Oh! Do I die? No, Never. How can I?
Death is a lie. How can Existence die?

अच्छेद्योहमदाह्योहमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एवच ।
नित्यस्सवर्गतः स्थाणुरजलोहं सनातनः ॥

I cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted nor parched.
I am eternal, in all, firm and unshaken.

(*Bh. Gita II adapted*).

Even persons who have not reached this high level but have studied an account of the progress of man's *Sookshmasarira, i.e.*, astral body as in W. T. Stead's "Life after Death, or Letters of Julia," or in Elsa Barker's "Letters of a living dead man" (or in any of the numerous works on that subject that have been issued during the last three decades), would get firmly convinced that personal life continues beyond the grave, that death is merely a trifling change of form, and that its real truth is as expressed in the allegory in Gareth and Lynette (Idylls of the King). Death is a terrific mask which if you boldly tear off, will reveal the smiling face of vigorous youth beneath. The fact is: "Death and life are different aspects of one

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and the same event," a change. That which is beyond all change, is the Real. Death and Birth are relative, the death of one form of life being, or leading to, birth in another. The Real is the Absolute beyond all these. Maharshi had realised the Absolute long ago and gone beyond these finite entities. He did not lament and weep when monkeys and dogs died at the Asram. Why should he exhibit any grief when Alagammal died ?

What happened to Alagammal after her death ? What happens to a person after leaving this fleshy cage ? This is the question put by Nachiketas to the God of Death (Kathopanishad) and by Jaratkarava Arthabhaga to Yajnavalkya in Janaka's sacrifice (Brihadaranyaka Upa. III 2 : 13). The answer is two-fold. Immediately, *i.e.*, from the *Vyavahara* stand-point, the answer is : the soul goes on to other bodies,—good souls to higher regions, middling souls to human society back again, and evil souls to lower forms of existence like cruel beasts or into still lower regions of torment. The second answer, *i.e.*, from the *Paramarthika* (the ultimate) standpoint is that death is the result of *Mithyajnana* (illusion), a perception of difference or plurality (नानात्वं) along with a consequent failure to see the one Real ; and when a person casts away such difference or plurality, death itself dies out and the Real is realised.

From either standpoint, it must have fared well with Alagammal. She spent her closing years in performing good works and securing merit *(Punya)* and thereby removed her ingrained taints *(Vasanas)*. Besides, Bhagavad Gita VIII 6 says

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यंयंवापिस्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कळेवरं ।
तंतमेवैति कौन्तेय सदातद्भावभावितः ॥

which means " whatever a departing soul thinks of (constantly and) at the time it leaves this body, in that same form it is embodied in afterlife." To enable her to think of the Supreme in the form of Sri Rama at the point of her death, Swami's brother and others were loudly performing *Rama Japa* (repeating the holy name of Rama), and reciting holy verses, a practice all pious people interested in the dying persons should imitate. Even after her breath had ceased (as even the scientists and doctors cannot fix the exact point which is termed death and as the spirit is said to be hovering near the body for sometime thereafter) they continued the recital of hymns in praise of God. So presumably she must have left her earthly mould with thoughts of heaven and must have gone there. If she was advanced enough to realise the Self, she might even have reached the highest. In any case, sorrow for her was uncalled for.

At the ceremonies which followed, the Swami seems to have been, mostly, a silent spectator. K. K. Ganapati Sastri came up shortly before dawn from the mango-tree cave. The question had already been raised and discussed that night, how the body should be dealt with (cremated, or interred). The Maharshi's answer in 1917 to the question what should be done with the remains of a woman-saint, was in favour of burial ; and so it was resolved to inter Alagammal's body. The previous evening, relations had been wired to and some of them turned up next morning. Meanwhile some of the disciples of Maharshi acting as pall-bearers carried the body across the Hill straight to the Palitirtham. However much the inmates of the

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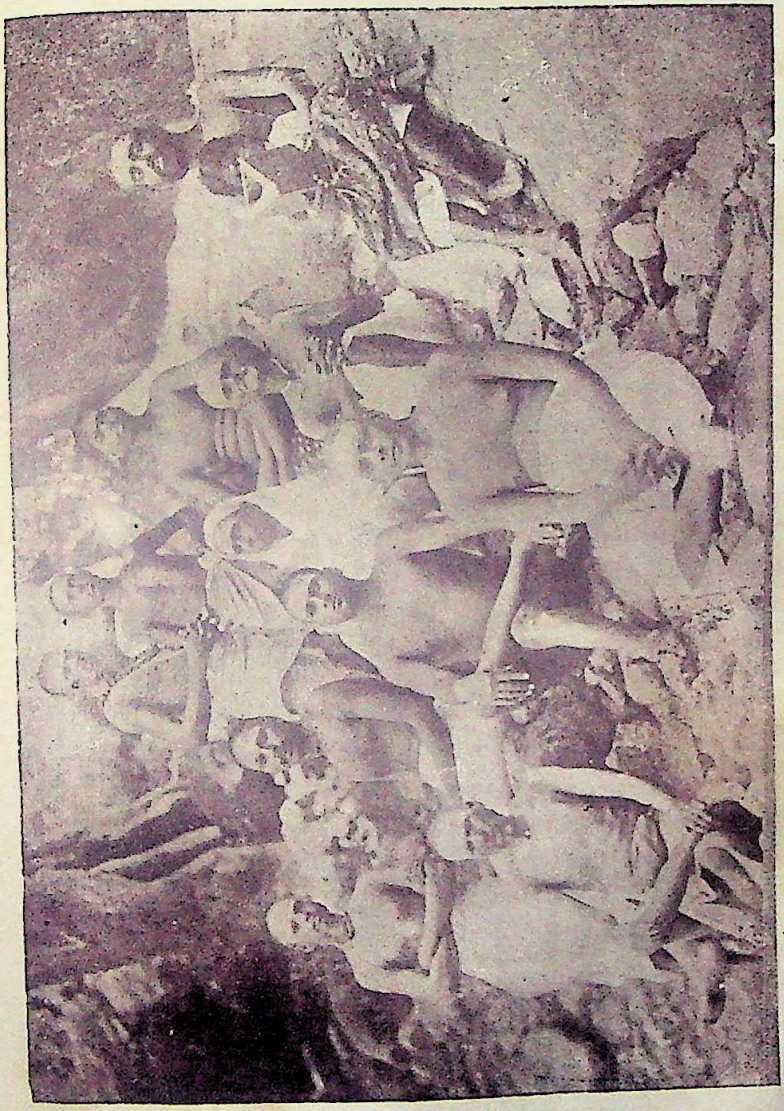

Group Photo taken near the Virupaksha Cave

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यंयंवापिस्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कळेवरं ।
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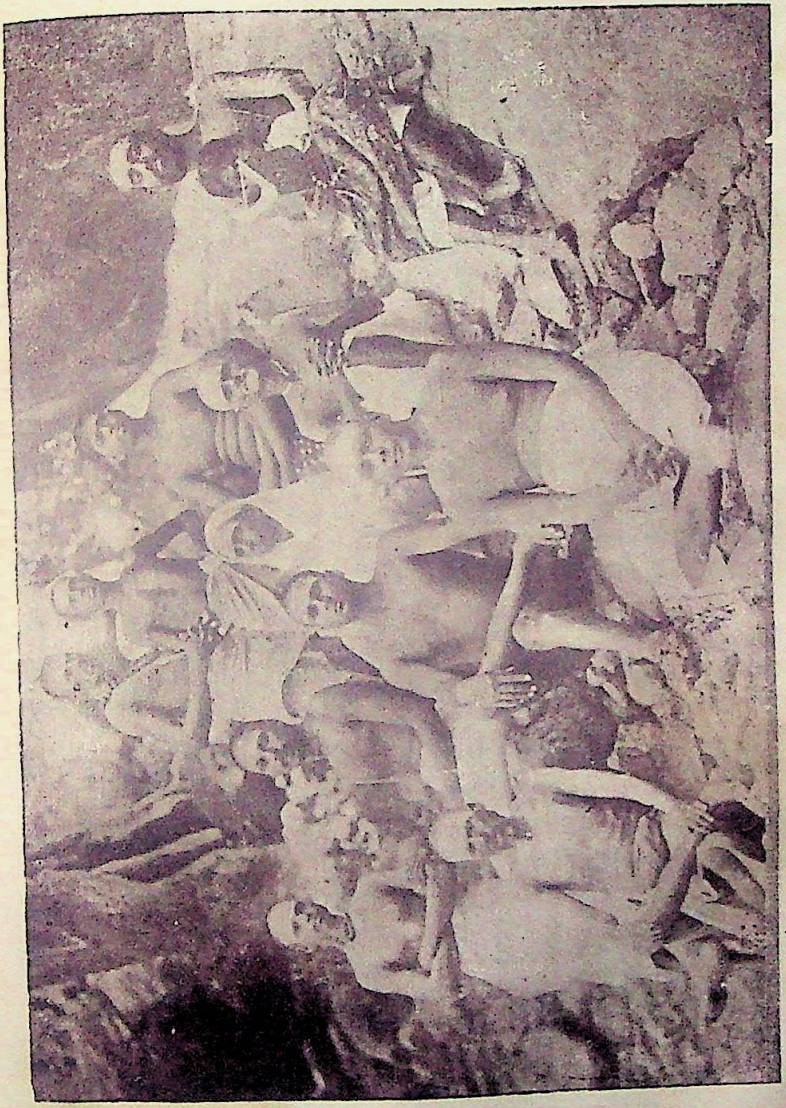

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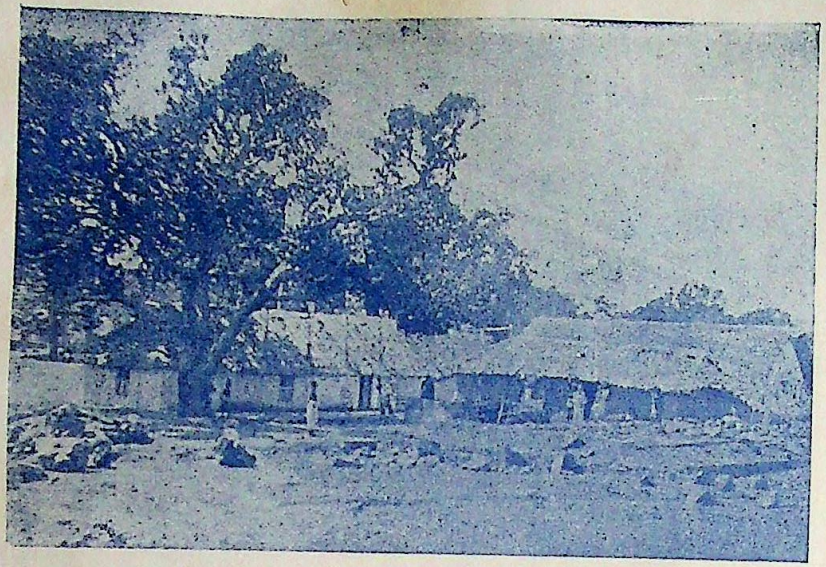

Sri Ramanasramam—in its Early Days

Alagammal
(Mother)

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Asram tried to avoid any fuss being made over the burial, it got noised abroad. Very large crowds swarmed to honour the remains of the lady that had given birth to the Brahmana Swami. In due form a pit was dug and the body placed therein. Heaps of holy ashes, salt, camphor, incense, &c. were thrown in to fill it up. Then masonry work was put up over it and *a linga* over the top. From that time, the Apotheosis of Alagammal* was complete; and her spirit in the *Linga* as identified with Siva or "Matrubhuteswara" is still daily worshipped in due form—with *abhishekam* (*i.e.*, bath) *naivedya* (*i.e.*, food) camphor, and *ashtotharanamavali* (*i.e.*, the recitation of 108 names of Siva).

Let not people suppose that Maharshi is so deeply imbued with philosophy—especially that of Karma as to have overcome all human feeling. Exactly the reverse is the case. By nature he is sympathetic; and since the great change of 1896 the grace or perfection of "charity" (*i.e.*, love) has coloured all his acts and permeated his very being. Generally he suppresses all emotion, its expression or manifestation, it is true; but he takes care to conform to Nature—so far as that is not injurious to his general plan of life. Many instances of his sympathy have been noted. Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer notes in his diary that Maharshi took a delight in helping him to fix even the auspicious date and hour for his daughter's wedding; and his sympathy

* It may be noted that similar rites of burial are observed whenever any sanyasi or elderly person dies, if there are disciples or relations with requisite means and a desire to so honour and "immortalise" the dead, and daily worship also is similarly carried on with the usual bath, food, lights, incense and praise.

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with Echammal in her calamities has already been recorded.

Recently K. S. Seshagiri Iyer, a Mylapore teacher, his wife and children came and stayed with Maharshi for a few days and enjoyed their stay as they love Maharshi deeply. When the young lady came to take leave to go back to Mylapore, tears choked all utterance and she could only sob. Maharshi was equally moved to tears. But in a minute, he corrected his attitude and said "Why should you not think you are going to Arunachalam ?"*

A very interesting question may be considered at this stage about the relation of emotion to illumination,—of devotion *(Bhakti)* to Realisation *(Jnana)*. Even at the time of Maharshi's leaving Madura, as already noted, he would at times sit concentrating on the Self, be lost in *Samadhi*, and at times visit the temple and pour out his soul in tears. These emotions continued and tears flowed for years even at Tiruvannamalai when stirring devotional songs were heard by him ; and even now the emotional element is present on similar occasions,—though tears are rare. Maharshi explaining these facts, says that devotion *(Bhakti)* and Realisation *(Jnana)* are the same and not different. In fact in Chapter XIII of Bhagavad Gita, the definition or description of the latter term includes the former ; the Gitacharya includes processes leading to Jnana, under the term Jnana. The steps leading to the terrace are seen by one who reaches the terrace (to use Sri Ramakrishna's illustration) to be the same as the terrace.

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* *i.e.*, Tiruvannamalai. He means "If you strenuously think I am at Mylapore in your house, you can feel my presence there."

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In the devotional path one starts by dwelling intently on the Personal God that one loves and proceeds till he loses himself or merges in Him. In the path of Inquiry one starts by dwelling on his self, which he loves most, and proceeds till it loses itself or merges in That. In both cases, Emotion or Personality characterize the beginning; and the end, in both cases, is without characteristics and indescribable except in negative terms, as beyond Emotion, Thought, Will and Personality.

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CHAPTER XXI

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SESHADRISWAMI

विद्वानेव विजानाति विद्वज्जनपरिश्रमम् ।

The wise alone can appreciate the labours of the wise.

From the contents of Chapter XIX, let it not be presumed that the *sadhus* of Tiruvannamalai or even a considerable section among them were hostile to Brahmana Swami. Of the thousands of sadhus in that place, only a handful were malignant. A good number of them had great regard for the Swami, and some even moved on very friendly terms with him. Tiruvannamalai, it was often said, had two eyes by which the town was sanctified—Seshadriswami and Ramana Maharshi. The former left his body on 14th January, 1929; and the extent of his popularity or influence was seen by the spontaneous concourse of crowds that came in their thousands to honour his remains. The living Swami is similarly honoured especially on the occasion of festivals like the Kartikai festival. It will be quite appropriate to note the points of contact between the two and the few striking features of similarity or difference between them in the matter of their attitude and behaviour.

Seshadriswami was an Ashtasahasram Brahmin born in 1870 at Vazhur (Wandiwash Taluk of the North Arcot District) and brought up by his mother's uncle, the devout and learned scholar and Pouranika, Kamakoti Sastriar, from whom (mainly through his mother Marakatammal) he derived his proficiency in, and attachment to, vocal music and Pouranic lore, especially the contents of the national

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epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. He had a very plastic and retentive memory. At the early age of fourteen, he had mastered sufficiently the chief books in Sanskrit literature and could express his thoughts in Sanskrit with ease. He was always serious, and he had intense devotion to the Goddess Kamakshi at Conjeevaram, where he lived with his father in the ancestral home. Reciting five hundred stanzas in her praise *(Mukapanchasati)*, he went round Her shrine, day and night. When we was about seventeen, he was initiated into Sakti (or Bala) Mantra, and carried on spiritual practices at dead of night, alone in a burial-ground adjoining a river or in the shrine of his family deity Periandavar. He appears to have had a vision of the goddess Sakti and to have been deeply changed thereby. He quickly lost all touch with domestic concerns and study, and took to wandering, and performing *Japa* of many *mantras* with deep concentration. He often spent whole nights in meditation. He was however treated roughly by all about him: so he left the place off and on and tried place after place to see which would suit him. His choice fell on Tiruvannamalai and he went there about 1890. His relations came there to recall him to Conjeevaram, but in vain. He stuck to Tiruvannamalai with hardly any break for about thirty-nine years. At the outset, he was roaming there apparently without aim, but aiming all the while at completing his *Vairagya* (detachment) and *Mantrajapa*. His tapas matured in about ten years and developed in him psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance and prophecy.

The virtuous alone are capable of friendship, *i.e.*, lasting friendship, says Epictetus. Those attached to the world's goods are drawn away from their friends; and hate sometimes replaces love. Two such unattached souls like Ramana Maharshi and Seshadri Swami might well be

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expected to be friends and permanent friends too, of each other. The expectation is fully borne out by the facts.

They had many points in common. Both were Brahmin bachelors who attained *vairagya* and left their homes at the age of seventeen or nineteen (just the critical period of maturity). Each had lost his father at an early age. Both were keenly intelligent and had retentive memories. Both were natives of places far away from Tiruvannamalai, but from an early age both were deeply devoted to its Lord, Arunachala. Both were orthodox till they left their homes; but soon after their arrival at Tiruvannamalai, both gave up caste prejudices in the matter of food, etc. In fact, both were sustained mainly on non-Brahmin but vegetarian food. Both stuck to their new abode with the determination not to leave it.

Seshadri was the earlier arrival. He was highly learned when he went there. He had composed Sanskrit verses and had a good command of the Vedas, Pancha Kavyas, Grammar, Prosody and Jyotisha, and was an excellent singer with a good knowledge of the theory of music. In all this the younger Swami was his antipodes. Seshadri had been treated as slightly "off his mind", with perhaps some reason. In fact, from his eighteenth year, wherever he went he was regarded by many as slightly insane; and he often put on the cloak of insanity, when he wished to avoid the rush and requests of many. Brahmana Swami never showed any touch of insanity, and never posed as insane, but adopted the rule of silence which served equally well to keep off curiosity hunters and troublesome crowds.

Seshadri found that the new arrival, Brahmana Swami, was a soul of rare worth and that he had transcended sense attraction, withdrawn his senses and his mind from

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external objects, and had constantly absorbed himself in *Samadhi*; and Seshadri tried to extend what help he could to the junior. He tried to save him from the pest of stone-flinging and pot-hurling lads. He met the junior again at Pavazhakunru and occasionally shared with him the food offered by the mutt at the foot of the Hill and by the visitors. When the junior moved to the Arunachala Hill, Seshadri went upto meet him at his cave and occasionally messed with him. Seshadri endeavoured to be unobtrusive in most of his activities; and his purpose, if any, was mostly undiscoverable. On some occasions, however, his aims were patent or expressed. Keenly grateful by nature, he tried to benefit his benefactors, those who gave him food or shelter. One Subrahmanya Mudali of Tiruvalur, his mother Alankarattammal and wife Kamakshiammal were spending their time, attention and wealth mostly in feeding sadhus since 1908-09. These twenty-seven years they are carrying meals to feed Maharshi and those with him, and they fed Seshadri whenever they could find him. True to his salt, the latter tried to wean Mudali from his worldly activities and turn him inward and God-ward. So Seshadri went uphill and told the Mudali, "You see, (my) younger brother has a salary of Rs. ten thousand; I have a salary of one thousand rupees. Why should you not try and secure a salary of a hundred at least?" Mudali discovered that by 'salary' Seshadri was referring to spiritual attainment, and by "younger brother" to Maharshi. But he was deeply involved in his agrarian litigation, with the hope of acquiring more land and growing richer. So he answered, "I have no time, Swami. I have my litigation and troubles to attend to." Seshadri repeatedly pressed him and "rebuked each dull delay," pointing out that the science of the Self was very easy to pick up, and that by neglect-

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ing it Mudali was incurring "*Brahma Hatya*," the mortal sin of slaying a Brahmana. Mudali was frightened and went to Maharshi in whom he had more faith, and reported this remark. "Yes," replied Maharshi. " You can be said to commit the murder of Brahman, by not knowing that you are Brahman."

Seshadri generally kept off most people from approaching him. If, however, they were devotees of " Ramanaswami' (as Seshadri styled the Maharshi) he discovered the fact at once by his thought-reading and gave them the needed help or at least a kind reply.

Echammal, who daily feeds Maharshi and his visitors, also fed Seshadri as often as he went to her house. Whenever the latter met her returning home in the evening he would inquire " whether she had given Ramanaswami his meals," and escort her to her house. He was as a rule quite disinclined to give advice on matters spiritual ; but as in the case of the above Mudali, he made an exception in her case also. When she asked " What are the *Mahavakyas* (the Grand Utterances) and what is their import ?" he lectured for hours (without reference to any book) on that subject and made the people of Echammal's house wonder at the depth of his learning and spiritual insight. Again when she was at her worship, he dropped in one day and asked her what she was adoring. " Only your portrait and Ramanaswami's." was her reply. "Why do you not practise *Dhyana* (meditation) ?" asked Seshadri. Though Echammal had already been taught meditation by a Guru and could spend a day or two in ecstatic trance with total loss of consciousness, she wished to get further instruction from this eminent saint and asked him how *Dhyana* was performed. He sat down at once bolt upright in the middle of her small apartment, with legs folded

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over each other, and keeping a level gaze, sank into *Samadhi* (ecstatic trance) and remained absorbed for four or five hours, at the end of which he awoke and said, "Do you see, Echammal ?" He taught her many a truth, consoled her and fortified her mind when she lost her foster child, Sellammal.

Seshadri always advised peopled to stick to the particular path they had chosen for spiritual development. He was an adept in Mantra Sastra, and by constant repetition of *mantras*, with due observance of the required conditions, had obtained a vision (*Darsan*) of his Goddess Kamakshi, Sakti, or Bala. He had practised numerous other *mantras* also : and from his quiver he would pull out the particular *mantra* suitable to the particular person who approached him to get initiation into a *mantra*. When Seshadri found that those who approached him had already faith in Ramanaswami, he would direct them to stick to him to the last, and not infrequently on such occasions he would either identify himself with Ramanaswami or point out that there was really no difference in serving either of the two.

Lakshmiammal (of Tiruchuzhi) had first visited Tiruvannamalai, fifteen years ago, stayed with Echammal, and spent an entire week in serving Ramana Maharshi. At the end of the week she remarked to Echammal, " I have stayed a week and not yet seen Seshadriswami." The next day as she was going through the temple on her way to Ramanasramam on the Hill she found Seshadri (with whom it was child's play to read the thoughts of people, near or remote, and to avoid, or appear, before them just as he thought fit) at the temple, bowed before him, and thought within herself that she was not blessed enough to serve him. In reply to her unuttered thought, he remarked

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இங்கே என்றால் என்ன, அங்கே என்றால் என்ன? " What does it matter whether here (you serve me) or there (you serve Ramanaswami)." Though he often avoided gifts of food, he would drop in, off and on, at the *mantapam* in the Arunachala temple where several disciples of Maharshi live and beg their food ; and after remarking, " I suppose there are no others here" (*i.e.*, other than disciples of Maharshi), he would seat himself at a plate and fall to his food. At other places, he would scatter food from his plate and never eat the whole of it. And when his hosts remarked, "Swami, this is *Bhikshanna* (begged food) ; so no food should be thrown away," he would reply, "You see, I am not scattering any."

About 1914 he regularly visited the Virupaksha cave for some weeks and shared the food with Maharshi. One day however, Kandaswami, the latter's attendant, found fault with him for scattering food and remarked "If you do this, I will not give you any more food." Seshadri who was very sensitive in such matters never again went up the Hill to share Maharshi's food. On this Palaniswami once remarked, "Ha ! Seshadri is not a wise man, not a *Jnani*. He scattered food and we expostulated with him. He never came up again for food at the Asrama." Seshadri never cared for good or evil report. But when Palaniswami's remark was mentioned to him, as it concerned his conduct towards Ramanasramam he defended his action by observing that one should not eat all the food placed before him, being surrounded by other (persumably hungry) creatures, and quoted* from *Sraddha* and other *Mantras*

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* अपगच्छन्तु ते भूता ये भूता भुवि संस्थिताः ॥
आगमार्थंतु देवानां गमनार्थं तु रक्षसाम् ॥

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to show that *elementals*, *spirits*, *Yakshas*, *Rakshasas*, etc., were found everywhere.

Somasundaraswami, a disciple of Maharshi, went away from the latter for a time, and was wavering in his mind as to whom he was to go for further guidance. So he went up one night and waited for Seshadri at the temple. As soon as he came, he looked at Somasundara, read his thoughts, and asked him to "go to Ramana"; and when Somasundara still hesitated and waited, Seshadri said more emphatically still, "Go, go, go to Ramana. Do not stop here." So Somasundara started off immediately and went to Ramanaswami in the dead of night.

A Sastri of Chidambaram, who was often visiting Maharshi and serving in the Asrama was one night at the above temple. To assist his spiritual soarings, he occasionally resorted to the use of the intoxicant drug, ganja (*canabis indica*). Unfortunately on this occasion, the drug used had evidently not been purified. Poor Sastri was therefore distressed to find that instead of making him spiritual, the drug had made him more carnal, for carnal thoughts were now flooding his brain. Not knowing what to do, he went and prostrated before Seshadri who at once saw how matters stood, and remarked, "I told you already not to use this drug, and yet you have used it." Now, Seshadri had never before given him that advice. But Maharshi had. So Sastri discovered that Seshadri was identifying himself with Maharshi.

When a contractor (A. V. Iyer) stood before Seshadri thinking of visiting Maharshi, Seshadri encouraged him by saying "மஹர்ஷிகள் தர்சனம் பரம பாவனம்" "Seeing Maharshi thoroughly cleanses the mind from sin."

A very interesting scene between these two spiritual giants (Maharshi and Seshadri) was witnessed in 1908 by

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Vasudeva Sastri, a disciple of Maharshi. Seshadri came up to the mango-tree cave where Maharshi was and sat gazing at him. A minute generally sufficed to enable him to read the thoughts and nature of any individual. But after long gazing at Maharshi, Seshadri pointed to Maharshi and broke out with the remark :—"இது என்ன நினைக்கிறதோ தெரியவில்லையே." "It is not clear what this person is thinking."

Maharshi however kept silent. Then Seshadri expressing his own view, said :—"If one worships God Arunachala, He will grant salvation."

Maharshi : "Who is the person who worships, who is the person worshipped ?

Seshadri breaking into a loud laugh said, "That is just what is not clear."

Then Maharshi expounded, for about an hour, the true Advaitin's realisation of Unity—of everything including God, the world and the individual souls. Seshadri patiently and quietly listened and at the end got up and said, "I cannot say. All that is dark to me. I at any rate worship." So saying he fell facing the crest of the Hill Arunachala, prostrated himself ten or fifteen times, and went down the Hill. He was then evidently keen on the maintenance of a personality distinct from God as the very foundation of worship.

But it would not be correct to suppose that Seshadriswami never cared for Advaitic realisation. He has on the other hand expressed that state pithily several times (after 1908) to Ramana's devotees. Once Echammal was getting Bhagavad Gita interpreted to her by a learned pandit at her house. Seshadri dropped in at the time. The pandit puffed up with pride of learning looked at him and

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remarked, concerning the difference between knowledge and realisation of the Self, *Jnana* : " See this person. Not even, for seven more generations can he attain Jnana." Seshadri put up with the impertinence and insult, and stayed awhile, and departed after remarking, " If when one tastes food, you see who* it is that tastes, then you have known Him, (*i.e.*, Brahman)."

Once C. Narayanaswami, B.A., found Seshadriswami near an Iyer's house in the Agraharam looking at a buffalo. The Iyer asked the Swami, " What is Swami looking at?" Seshadri answered " I am looking at this." Iyer then asked, " Is it the buffalo Swami is looking at ?" Then Seshadri turned to C. N. and asked him (pointing to the buffalo) " Say what this is." C. N. replied " It is a buffalo."

" எருமையா? எருமையா? எருமை! ப்ரஹ்மம் என்று சொல்." " Is it a buffalo? a buffalo? (you) Buffalo! Style it Brahman," was Seshadri's remark as he left the place immediately.

His advice to Natanananda when he tried to approach Maharshi is given in a later chapter.

The high regard Seshadriswami had for, and his occasional identifying himself with, Ramana Maharshi, explain a curious observation which he once made to a clerk T. V. Iyer who was deeply attached to him and in whom he took much interest. Iyer regarded Maharshi also in the light of a Guru. Once when Iyer was alone with Seshadri, the latter evidently to further develop his faith in his Guru (*Gurubhakti*) which is absolutely essential for spiritual progress, asked him " Do you know

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* *i.e.*, if one analyses one's self and learns the *real* basis of it.

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there are three *lingas* (embodiments or visible representations) of God here (*i.e.*, at Tiruvannamalai) ?"

Iyer: I do not know that there are three. One Linga is the Hill, I know only that.

Seshadri: No. No. You know all the three.

Iyer: No Swami, pray tell me what the other two are.

Seshadri: No, you know them.

Iyer: No, Swami.

Seshadri: One *linga* they call Ramanaswami.

Iyer: Yes, Swami, now I know the second. Pray which is the third?

Seshadri: You know it too.

Iyer: No, Swami, I do not.

Seshadri: The third *linga*, they call Seshadri.

Iyer: That is you, Swami, is it not?

Seshadri: You know it.

Iyer: I do not know.

Seshadri: Yes, it is I.

Before closing this narrative, the amicable relations between the two Swamis may be illustrated by reference to a dream. Students of psycho-analysis would note that one's inmost thoughts are often brought to the surface in dreams. Maharshi related in March 1930 to his disciples that he had, a few days previously, met Seshadriswami in a dream. Seshadri (of the dream) was having a shave. Maharshi went up and patted him on the back, saying "Hallo." Seshadri looked up and finding that it was Maharshi who was patting him, got up and held him fast in embrace for many minutes.

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Seshadri Swami

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Latest Group of Devotees with Maharshi

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After Seshadri passed away, Maharshi went up and was present on the scene for an hour witnessing the formalities of the saintly interment amidst a crowd of thousands of people and added to the impressiveness and sanctity of the proceedings by his presence.

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CHAPTER XXII

A ROBBERY AT THE ASRAM

"Resist not evil: But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."

One of the best tests of true asceticism, and of the soundness of altruistic institutions, is the way in which wealth and its problems are faced. Wealth stands for all comforts of the flesh and vanities of the soul as almost everything—from sense enjoyments to "incense kindled at the Muse's flame,"—can be had for money, either immediately or after a time, when due steps are taken. Asceticism and altruism involve the deliberate rejection of vanities and enjoyments, and hence the injunction to flee wealth and to cherish "holy poverty" as the highest prize.

Prophets have declaimed against the love of riches, as the root of all evil, and warned the rich that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God"; that they should lay up treasures for themselves, "in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal," and that they cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time.

Easy as it is to declaim, denounce, or preach, it is the hardest feat to judge as to when, how and how far, wealth is to be avoided, acquired or retained in actual life. A hermit sworn to observe "holy poverty" sometimes even overdoes his vow and thereby ruins his body and mind, or generally treats it as a counsel of perfection only, helps him-

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self with the excuse that the flesh is weak, and is termed a hypocrite. "Holy poverty" indeed! Poverty comes, an unbidden and unwelcome guest, with freezing looks, to rob people of and intensify their longing for, the comforts and necessaries of life, making existence itself a burden and holiness almost impossible. The few that steel their hearts, at first to endure and finally to embrace her, are doubtless holy. But such holiness is so rare and precious that fame and wealth soon spot it out and besiege it. Poverty then flies away, and with it holiness too, not infrequently. What an unstable compound is this "holy poverty"—poverty chasing away holiness, and holiness poverty!

Maharshi, having from the beginning led an absolutely pure and unattached life, was never left in want. Food was all he wanted, and Providence gave him enough and to spare. But from the time that dependents, as also visitors, began to look up to him or his asram for their requirements, a social or economic problem arose which was solved at different times with varying success. The dependents, who begged food for themselves and for the Swami, did not raise any such difficulties. But as his fame for *Vairagya* (*i.e.*, dislike of wealth, etc.) and for self-abnegation spread, supplies of food, nay luxuries, poured upon him—such are the ways of Dame Fortune, who dogs the heels that spurn her. The question arose as to how this inflow of wealth should be faced. The Swami had no hesitation about himself. When at Gurumurtam, admiring people brought sundry eatables in the afternoon or evening, they found him seated on his stool in a corner with eyes closed; and they were promptly told by Palaniswami (who was then in attendance) that till noon of the following day, the Swami would not even open his eyes,—much less eat anything; and the visitors would themselves distribute what they had brought, amongst those

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present, and go away. But when the Swami was on the Hill leading a more social life, offerings flowed; and what was he to do with them? He never hesitated in applying the golden rule of "share and share alike." He never cared to accept anything in which those present could not share. If eatables were brought, he picked a little off the plate and the rest was immediately distributed amongst those present. Even if the articles presented were costly fruits or other rarities, the same rule was applied. Loving presents worth ten or twenty rupees would be brought by deeply devoted admirers and in a few minutes, the whole would disappear down the throats of all present—boys and girls, men and women, rich and poor alike. As a rule, nothing was reserved for a later occasion or for the Swami's exclusive use. This solution of the problem increased his popularity and spread the fame of his equality *(Samatva)* and indifference to wealth, which in turn increased the flow of presents, whereas it kept the Asram really poor. Money he never touched since he threw away his three rupees and a half after his arrival at Tiruvannamalai. One would suppose that Maharshi at any rate had successfully dealt with problems of wealth and poverty, even in the midst of his dependents and visitors. But nothing on earth is perfect;—and the general success of poverty at the Asram had its exceptions, which may be illustrated by what follows.

The wealth, Rs. 100 of Uddandi Nainar, that the Swami rejected was left with G. Seshier for Swami's use or such use as Swami would approve of. This is the way that wealth from time to time attached itself to the Swami and his Asram, always bringing with it cares, troubles and endless problems which he has solved by cutting the Gordian knot. When he was in the mango-tree cave, subscriptions of several hundred rupees were raised and

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expended in improving the buildings—and shortly after the improvement, he left the cave and moved to another—the Skandasram. There again, money was freely raised and expended in building a neat masonry cottage and providing it with a good garden; and then questions of right, and claims of "*meum*" and "*tuum*" sprang up among some dependents (never of course with Maharshi himself), and the result was an unhappy rift in the lute, which has ever since marred the unity of Asram-life among his dependents. When he left that Asram for the hut near his mother's tomb at the Palitirtham, wealth flowed in again; and decent and costly cottages with a luxuriant garden have arisen by the side of the tomb. The Swami never cared for these and never wanted any possessions. But they came and the world—especially the world of want, poverty and crime—always associated him with the ownership of such valuable property. When, on various occasions, devotees gave freely of their money or articles of food, large masses were constantly fed there; and the number generally fed even on an ordinary day mounted to fifty or more. A sudden inflow of half a dozen or even a dozen guests was no hard problem; and food was provided for them all, as either money or articles were always sent in somehow. In fact very little remained after expenditure to be kept over as a reserve. But beggars, criminals, and some others carried away the impression that the Asram was a rich institution. Many went there for a nice dinner, as none was sent away without being given a regular course of meal, along with the Swami, or at least the doles of food distributed to the poor, outside the dinner-hall, before the Swami's meal. Many people thought the Asram "fair game" for them to secure what they could, out of its overflowing charity. A few daring spirits also came up occasionally, and tried to employ moral

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or criminal pressure to get wealth out of the Swami or his Asram.

A few years ago, a young, rotund and well-fed person dropped into the Asram. As none is ever kept out, and as the Swami is available to all comers at any hour without need of announcement or permission to enter, this person went up, bowed and sat before the Swami. He opened fire straightaway with the question (in English) to the Swami, "You have realised God, I hope?" The question in the circumstances was warranted neither by rules of English etiquette (and the new comer evidently claimed acquaintance with the English language and English etiquette), nor by Indian rules of behaviour towards Swamis. The Swami kept silent. The visitor waited awhile and unabashed by the failure of his first attempt, cast a look on the tiger-skin on which the Swami was sitting (and which was probably accepted, despite its cost, etc. by the Swami, as being a loving present from some disciple of what the Sastras prescribe as a good aid to yoga) and tried his second squib. "Is it sin Swamiji to kill tiger?" he asked regardless alike of etiquette and of grammar. This also failed to explode. The Swami kept silent, noting at once that the visitor was anxious to draw him into a controversy and to impale him on the horns of a dilemma. The visitor evidently sought to force the Swami to say that killing animals is no sin or to admit abetment of the sin after the fact. Some one present tried to explain to the visitor that blank general doctrines would not do, and the answer might depend upon special circumstances. But before the explanation was fully offered, the visitor pertly remarked "I did not question you please, I want the Swami alone to answer." So there was perfect silence for ten or fifteen minutes; and the visitor left the hall.

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When the visitor was questioned by one of the inmates as to how he maintained himself, he frankly declared that he lived upon the finances of the rich mutts that he would now and then sponge upon. The visitor asked next "Is this Swamiji a rich Swami?" The luxuriant and extensive garden and the costly hall were in part responsible for this visitor's attempt to squeeze some money out of Maharshi by cornering him with clever questions about non-observance of the principle of *Ahimsa* (harmlessness) and the inexpressible nature of self-realization. Discomfited in his attempt at extortion and discovering perhaps that he had lighted upon a Swami with but an illusory show of wealth the visitor left the place, obtaining only a meal or two at the Asram.

If this visitor attempted to gain wealth at the expense of the Swami or the Asram by what may be termed 'civil extortion,' others who shared the illusion that Maharshi was a "rich Swami" did not stop with employment of civil means. Twice in 1924, during the summer months, did thieves enter the Asram at night and carry off what they could. On the first occasion, they entered the temple or Samadhi of his mother by opening a hole in the wall, and carried off a few things unnoticed. A weak later, a more darling feat was accomplished by three robbers. A brief account of it may serve to show even the appearance of wealth is fraught with evil consequences, how perfectly Maharshi carries out the principles of indifference to wealth and even to his body; and how calm, self-possessed, scrupulous and altruistic he is, even in the most trying circumstances.

It was a dark summer night about 11-30 P.M. on 26th June, 1924, and Maharshi had retired to rest as usual, on the dais in the long thatched hall in front of his mother's

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Samadhi. Four disciples were taking their rest, near various windows, in the hall. After mid-night two of them, Kunjuswami and Mastan, heard the loud remark of some persons outside—the thieves—"There are six persons lying inside." Mastan inquired "Who is it?" The thieves replied by smashing the glass panes of a window, their evident intention throughout being to strike terror in the minds of the inmates. Kunju and Mastan left their beds near that window and came near Maharshi's dais, as a safer place of retreat. The thieves then ran up and smashed the window near Maharshi who merely sat on in silence. Kunju then opened the northern door of the hall and brought Ramakrishna (another disciple) from an adjoining hut for help. Meanwhile through the open door, the two dogs of the Asram, *viz.*, Karuppan and Jack issued out and the thieves beat them mercilessly. The sickly Karuppan howled and ran in immediately, while Jack ran away. When Kunju returned to the hall, he and Maharshi told the thieves that there was very little for them to take, and that they were welcome to enter and take what they liked. Still without listening to them, the thieves kept digging out a window-frame from the wall. Then Kunju began to use threats and said he would give them a good drubbing if they persisted in their mischief; and he tried to go out of the southern door to face the thieves. Maharshi dissuaded him.

"Let these (thieves) play their role (*Dharma*). We shall stick to ours. Let them do what they like. It is for us to bear and forbear. Let us not interfere with them." Despite this manifestation of unruffled forbearance (*titiksha*) on the part of Maharshi and of Kunju, who followed Maharshi's direction, the bluster and mischief of the thieves increased; and they threw some squibs at the window,

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and succeeded in creating the impression that they had fire-arms with them. Again they were told to enter and take what they liked, not minding Kunju's threats; but they replied with vows of vengeance on that young man. Then Kunju left the cottage and cut across the fields to reach the town to get some people for help so that Maharshi might be safe.

Meanwhile Ramakrishna again addressed the thieves and asked them not to create unnecessary trouble but to take or do what they liked. The thieves threatened to burn down the thatched roof. Maharshi told them that they should not do that, and offered to leave the hall and go away with the other inmates. This was the very thing the thieves wanted and they agreed. Maharshi wanted the sickly dog Karuppan should first be taken to a safe place lest the thieves should beat and kill it; and Ramakrishna carried it to a shed. Before he returned, Maharshi with the other disciples Thangavelu Pillai, Mastan, and Munisamier issued out of the northern door. The thieves beat each of them mercilessly, with sticks, evidently with a view to disable them. Maharshi received a blow over his left thigh, and at once said "If you are not satisfied yet, you may strike on the other leg also." But either the ruffian's heart did not allow him to take the Swami at his word, or what is more probable, Ramakrishna came up just in time, extended both his hands over the Swami, and thus warding off the thief's strokes, took Maharshi further north. Then the beaten party reached the *pandal* of the northern shed and sat there. The thieves directed them to stay there, adding "If you budge from here, your heads will be smashed." Maharshi told the thieves, "You have the entire hall to yourself; do what you like." Then a thief returned and said he wanted a hurricane lamp.

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Maharshi ordered that it should be given to him and Ramakrishna gave him a lighted lamp. Again a thief returned and wanted the keys of the bureau. But this bunch, Kunju had carried away and the thief was informed of that fact. The thieves broke open the almirahs, and carried away a razor, strips of silver that adorned the images, a little rice and some mangoes. The total worth of the asram property thus taken, was ten rupees. Cash *viz.*, six rupees of the visitor Thangavelu Pillai was also taken away. A thief, grossly disappointed, returned with uplifted stick and said "Where is your money, where do you keep *that*?" Maharshi told him that they were poor *sadhus* living upon alms—and never had cash. Repeatedly the thief urged this question, got the same reply, and then went back to the hall.

After the thief went back, as Ramakrishna and others had received many injuries, Maharshi advised them to use some balm for allaying their pain. "But what about Swami?" was Ramakrishna's inquiry, and the Swami humourously replied that he had "received adequate *pooja*,"—which literally means worship, but here signified blows. Ramakrishna then saw the weal over the left thigh of his master. He seized an iron implement that was hard by and wanted "permission to go in and see what the thieves were doing." Maharshi noted his excitement and dissuaded him from violence. "We are *sadhus*, we should not give up our role (*Dharma*)" he said. "If you go and strike them, some may die. That will be a matter for which the world will justly blame—not the thieves, but *us*. These are only misguided men. They are blinded by ignorance. But let *us* note what is right and stick to it. Sometimes your teeth suddenly bite your own tongue. Do you knock out the teeth in consequence?"

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Maharshi thus quieted the passion Ramakrishna felt for avenging his master.

By 2 A.M. the thieves left. Later, Kunju returned with a village officer and a couple of constables. Maharshi was still seated in the northern shed, calm, composed and discoursing with the disciples on matters spiritual as usual. The constables asked Maharshi what had happened. He drily remarked that some fools had broken into the Asram and gone away disappointed at finding nothing worth their trouble. The constables made an entry of this fact and went away with the officer. Munisamier (a young boy doing pooja at the Asram) then ran after them and told them that Maharshi and others had been beaten by the robbers. In the morning the Circle Inspector, Sub-Inspector, and a Head Constable came up for investigation; and after these, came the Deputy Superintendent. Maharshi talked to none of them about his injury.

In the course of that day or the succeeding days Maharshi never spoke with anger or pain about the thieves—in fact rarely referred to the incident. A few days later, some of the Asram property was recovered and the thieves who were three *Irulars** of Kallakurichi Taluk were arrested, promptly tried, convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

Many preach and write that if any one smites us on the right cheek, the other cheek also must be turned to him, that hate should not be met by hate but by love. Few however turn the other cheek or love their enemies. Few when violently attacked can really feel that the assailant too is "That," or that they form with him one body, "one stupendous whole," and should love, harmonise and co-

* A criminal tribe.

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operate with him. Few in severe pain or imminent danger will ignore their own interests and try first to save a sickly dog or relieve the pain of their attendants.

The robbery came really as a test to prove that the self-conquest and self-effacement, the equanimity *(Samatva)* and dispassion *(Vairagya)*, the forgiveness and beneficence that characterised the young Swami at the Patalalinga, Iluppai tree foot, and Gurumurtam, had not been lost but only matured during the twenty-six years of ample comfort, attention, adulation and worship from his admirers and disciples.

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CHAPTER XXIII

ANIMAL COMPANIONS.

Who sees with equal eye, as lord of all
A hero perish or a sparrow fall,
.....
To him no high, no low, no great, no small.

—*Pope.*

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small.

One characteristic of Maharshi, that strikes every visitor to the Asram is the way in which he deals with animals, especially those living in the Asram. "Lakshmi is come. Give her rice-food at once," he says, looking from the hall through the window, and the newcomer thinks that some young girl has to be given her meal. But presently steps in a cow answering the name "Lakshmi." "Have the boys (பசங்கள்) been given their food?" he again asks. Probably there are little boys brought up here or come out for a visit—one thinks. But presently a couple of dogs answer a whistle and each is told to take his plateful of rice-food. "He wants water" says Maharshi referring to one of them—"Rose." "Come here, boy" he calls to a little cat. "Lie down and wait awhile for your plate." One watches the Swami for days, months and years, and never finds him calling any of these animals "it" or treating it as being less than a human being.

The key to Maharshi's treatment of the animal inmates of the Asram and the animals outside, is soon discovered. First, from the level of the average man, he views these as

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life's stars that have had elsewhere their setting, as souls that have come from afar casting off their former, perhaps human sheaths, to live near him and work out the effects of of their past *(karma)* actions.

Next his outlook on life being seldom confined to this level, he soars ever higher and higher in flights spiritual; and from that height, the things (and animals) of the world are lumped together, man and brute without difference, as *Iswara* (God). Then in his view

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole
Whose body Nature is, but God the Soul;
That changed through all, and yet in all the same;
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame;
Warms in the Sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full as perfect in a hair, as heart:
As full as perfect in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
To him, no high, no low, no great, no small
He fills, he bounds, connects and equals all.
Nothing is foreign, parts relate to whole,
One all extending, all preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least;
Made beast in aid of man, and man of beast;
All served, all serving; nothing stands alone;
The chain holds on;—and where it ends, unknown."

The Swami is ever realising the unity of being and finds,

"Nothing in the world is single;
All things, by a law divine,
In one another's being mingle."

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Dogs

Ever since the Swami went up the Hill dogs have been his companions and participants of the life of the Asram. He knows their pedigree as well as he knows his own. "This Kamala is the ancient dame. 'Nila' and 'Jack' are her children; 'Rose' and these little imps are her grand-children," he would say to a new-comer. Addressing the little pups, when Kamala lay adying, he said: "you little fellows! why do you not go and see your granny? She is going to leave you soon"; and after her death, he addressed 'Rose,' just as he would address, or sympathise with, any human disciple who came to him in his bereavement. "Rose, you have lost your granny Kamala." He remembers the series of dogs at the Asram, which in memory of their predecessors were given the same name, but which to distinguish them from each other are respectively styled here No. I, II, etc. Jack I was the first of the series. He was succeeded by Jack II, etc. As it is not the object of this book to write their biographies, but only that of the Swami, just a few facts only of the canine inmates of the Asram will be noticed,—to illustrate the Swami's attitude towards (and treatment of) these companions or disciples. The term "disciples" and "companions" need not raise a smile in the reader, as if to ridicule the suggestion that these dogs have a moral purpose and spiritual principles and a capacity for spiritual improvement. The Swami's account of several of these dogs will remove the reader's incredulity. Let us take any of these at random. Here is the account given by the Swami to the writer of these pages a few years back.

"Chinna Karuppan was pure black all over, whence his name. He was a person of high principles. As we were in the Virupaksha cave, something black used to pass

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us, at a distance from us. We would be able to see his head peeping over the bushes sometimes. His *Vairagya* (*i.e.*, non-attachment) appeared to be very strong. He kept company with none,—seemed in fact to avoid company. We respected his independence and *Vairagya* and used to leave him food, near his place and go away. One day, as we were going up, Karuppan suddenly jumped across the path, and romped upon me wagging his tail in glee. How he singled me out of the group for the display of his affection, was the wonder. Thereafter he was with us in the Asram as one of the inmates. A very intelligent and serviceable fellow he was; and how high-souled! He had lost all his former aloofness and was proving very affectionate. Universal brotherhood was his motto. He would hobnob with every visitor and inmate, get up his lap and nestle close to him. His overtures would be mostly well received. A few however tried to avoid him. But he was indefatigable in his efforts and would take no refusal as final. If however he was ordered off, he obeyed like a monk observing the rule of obedience. Once he went near an orthodox Brahmin who was engaged in repetition of holy syllables at the foot of a bel tree close to our cave. The Brahmin considered dogs to be unholy and scrupulously avoided their contact and even proximity. Yet Chinna Karuppan [evidently understanding and observing only the natural law of equality (*samatvam*)] insisted on going near him. An inmate of the Asram, out of consideration for the Brahmin's feelings, raised his stick and beat the dog but not forcibly; and he wailed and ran away. Karuppan who then left the Asram, was never again found. He would not care to approach a place where he was ill-treated even once. So sensitive he was! In fact hat inmate had made this mistake despite previous

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warning, evidently because he did not rate this dog's principles and sensitiveness at their proper worth. The warning given to him and to all else was this-wise. 'Once before, Palaniswami had been rude in speech and behaviour to Chinna Karuppan. It was a cold rainy night. All the same, Chinna Karuppan left the precincts and was lying outside on a bag of charcoal, some distance from the Asram, whence he was recalled only next morning.' Another warning had been given from the behaviour of a little dog. 'Palaniswami some years back chid the little dog that was with us at the Virupaksha cave. He at once ran down into the Sankha tirtam tank and in five minutes his carcase was floating there. Palaniswami and all others were at once told that dogs and other animal inmates of the Asram have intelligence and principles of their own and should not be roughly treated.' We do not know what souls may be tenanting these bodies and for finishing what portion of their unfinished *Karma*, they seek our company."

About other dogs and their relation to, and behaviour with, Maharshi, there is much interesting history to write; but space permits only a few more notes to be set down here.

The Asram had several dogs manifesting great intelligence and serving strangers as guides—like St. Bernard's dogs. Segappan, Kamala, and others were able to guide strangers all round the Hill. "Kamala, take this stranger round" was all the Swami had to say; and she would take him to every image, tank, and cave all round the Hill, and bring him back. Jack No. 1, combined strict obedience with intelligence and sensitiveness. Once Maharshi and others started from Virupaksha cave to make a circuit round the Hill, walking directly across the Hill and into the

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forest for a good distance. When starting, Maharshi said to Jack as he was lying down at the cave "Now we are going for our circuit. You had better go down to the town." They started off, walking southwards across the hill and had done over a mile. As they walked on, they noticed that Jack was running down the Hill to the town, *i.e.*, towards the east in obedience to the order given to him. After some distance he was lost to sight. After they had walked over a mile in their own direction into the forest, they noted that Jack had gone down to the foot and reascended the Hill and was waiting for them in the track they had chosen. Maharshi told him then "You had better go away to the Asram and not go with us." And away went the dog, probably sore at heart to part company from his master, prizing obedience however as a great virtue. But this was not his only virtue. He was a great *Tapasvi* (self-restrainer) and a lover of peace and quiet. He would take his breakfast out of the food offered to God at a dancing-girl's house in the morning, then accompany the priest to a temple on the Hill, and leaving him there, he would climb up higher (*i.e.*) to the Virupaksha cave to meet Maharshi and then go and squat in the adjoining kennel-like cave and remain there in silence and peace. He would not associate with other dogs or be a party to quarrels and squabbles. At 9 or 9-30 A.M. he would go down and be just in time to take the *Naivedya* or *bali* (*i.e.*) food offering at the Hill temple and run back to the kennel-cave. He would take what was given to him (if any) at the Asram and not hanker after things to eat at other times, or run about seeking the company of bitches. Just in the evening, he would run down and go back to the dancing-girl's house for his night meal and sleep at a mutt with the priest. His life was just the life of a quiet hermit

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(*Satvic Vyragi*) trying to end his days at the feet of God. One morning, a cheeta* set on him and mauled his neck and he set up a howl—which was heard at the Hill temple. The priest there raised a cry and the cheeta left him and ran away. Jack who escaped the jaws of the cheeta then, seems however to have fallen a victim later, *i.e.*, in 1905-06, when plague raged in the town for five or six months and the houses were deserted. Jack had stayed with the priest at the Hill-temple, somehow failing to accompany the Swami to Pachaiamman Koil. During those months cheetas from the adjoining reserve forests were openly visiting the deserted streets of the town (and of course, the Hill) even by day and Jack must have been an easy prey to them.

Maharshi, as stated already, treats dogs (and as for that matter, other creatures also) not as contemptible or polluting creatures but as fellow ascetics, who have come to work out their Karma in his proximity. He talks to them and gives them a few simple directions which they mostly understand and obey. He is careful about their comfort, cleanliness, baths, beds, etc., and terms them affectionately "பையன்கள்"—"the boys" or "children" of the Asram. Just as children are given their food first, these dogs, as also cats, cows, etc., are first served with their meals or any sweets received; and thereafter, the beggar-guests (the "दरिद्रनारायण" *i.e.*, "God in the guise of the poor") waiting outside the dinner-hall are given doles of food; and lastly Maharshi and other guests and inmates of the Asram sit down to partake of the remaining food. Whether it is coffee or candy, cake or other cooked food,

* The cheetas are really tigers but are smaller in size than the Royal Bengal tigers. They seldom attack men.

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that is to be taken, these "children" must be served first.

Maharshi's treatment of dogs, monkeys, etc., did not stop with these items of attention. He was unmarried and had no children. But it was God's will to give him a family of other "children," not begotten of him. That difference should not, and did not, make any difference in their treatment. For instance, when Kamala came as a little pup to Skandasram, the inmates wished to drive her off lest she should litter the Asram with pups year after year. Little Kamala put up with all the rudeness offered but would not leave the place. The Asram bowed to the inevitable and Kamala grew up and littered at the Asram year after year; and her pups became a large family (*Samsara*) encumbering the Asram. Maharshi however did not swerve from his *Samabuddhi* (*i.e.*) principle of equal treatment to man and beast. On the occasion of the first delivery of this Kamala, she was given her bath, painted with turmeric, decked with dots of vermilion on the forehead, given a clean place in the Asram, and kept there for ten days with her pups. On the tenth day, the *Punyahavachanam* (*i.e.*, purification) was celebrated with not merely a bath for her, but with the regular feasting on *payasam* and sweet-meats, for all. At the death of these animal companions Maharshi was generally in attendance by their side in their last moments, just as he was by his mother in her last moments. When they breathed their last, they were given a solemn and decent burial in or near the Asram just as any other inmate would be given and a stone was planted over the tomb. A full account of how Maharshi dealt with the numerous dogs that were his fellows in these Asrams would fill a volume. We may content ourselves here with this

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comparatively brief mention, and the assertion that if anyone lives up to the ideal set out in the Bhagavat Gita:

"The wise look with equal eye on a learned but humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a chandala living on dog's flesh,"—

विद्याविनयसंपन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनिचैव श्वपाकेच पण्डितास्समदर्शिनः ॥

it is Maharshi. In fact eminent pandits and the Asram dogs sat alike on the same floor before Maharshi and were equally attended to in his presence. Neither was preferred to the other by him in the matter of provision of food, bedding or attention and treatment in disease, hurt, etc.

Cows

The Swami's treatment of dogs may appear nothing uncommon to dog-lovers especially among the Europeans. His treatment of other animals may be mentioned next. Some years back a cow was kept for a short time in the Asram at the Palitirtham. It was with difficulty guarded from the attacks of cheetas. One of its calves is Lakshmi. But when Lakshmi was very young, she and her mother (requiring continued attention which the Asram could not then bestow) were given away to some one in the town. One festive day two years ago these two were brought to the Asram. Since then, Lakshmi runs up to the Asram every morning, and has the entire pasture at the Asram to herself. She certainly does not content herself with that. She knows meal time and tiffin time and on both occasions she walks right into the Asram hall and places her head on Maharshi who strokes her with affection and calls out to people at the kitchen to give her food.

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She sometimes seizes an entire bunch of eight or ten plaintain fruits that some one may have brought, or dirties the hall with her excreta ; perhaps a desciple in attendance threatens to beat her : the Swami at once intercedes on her behalf. If she should trespass on the small vegetable garden, the Swami objects to her being scolded or roughly treated. "You must fence your plot better. The fault is there and not with Lakshmi," he says. On festive occasions she gets a good bath, turmeric paste and a little dot of vermilion powder on her forehead, with possibly one or more garlands of flowers round her neck. She goes up to the Swami and takes leave every evening before leaving the Asram for the town and takes in "parting presents" if any should be available. *She is the Sakuntala of the Asram now. Maharshi sometimes informs those present of her history and quotes with evident approval the theory of his devotees that Lakshmi is the present incarnation of the "old lady with the greens" "கீரைப்பாட்டி." When the Swami went uphill in 1900, there was an old lady who used to go round gathering greens and other edible shrubs and beg for sundry articles. She would cook these in her own nook at the temple on the Hill and carry up a good share of it to the young Swami and say, "Here have I brought just a little of greens, take it." It would often be a good quantity though. The Swami would take it. He would often go down to her residence, cut vegetables, remove the fibres and assist her in her cooking. That old dame, loving him with all a mother's love, left this earth some years back and is interred close to the present Asram. Is the dull clod there all that is left of her? No. "Her love in higher love endures." The divine glow in her breast

*The above description of Lakshmi was written in 1930. She is now (1936) a permanent resident of the Asram with other cows.

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must surely have swollen the divine stream in the young Swami's heart that now nourishes and supports hundreds or thousands that affectionately flock to him and get their full meed of love from him. Among these thousands, by no means the least, is Lakshmi, who loves her lord and is loved by him. Is not the same golden thread of love in the spirit of the "Greens Dame" clearly discernible in Lakshmi?

Monkeys

Ever since the Swami went up the Hill in 1900 and up to November 1922 when he came down to the present Asram he has moved with monkeys very closely, understands their cries and their conduct, and has followed the history of several of them. He has studied them and found that they have a code of morals, principles of government, a system of sending a plenipotentiary from one camp to meet another from another camp, before war is declared or amity is resolved upon, and many other principles and feelings common to men. He watches their swimming, diving and other sports, and once at the Hill Asram tended one of their kings or "chieftains" known as *Nondi* since his infancy. The intense and sincere sympathy the Swami has towards animals, enables him to understand their feelings, attitude and even their cries. He often tells the inquirer that monkeys used to regard him as one of their own class. "Monkeys as a rule would ex-communicate one of their group, if he had been looked after by men; but they made an exception in the case of this Asram. When there are internecine bickerings and misunderstandings, both sets would come to me and I would pacify them by parting them and pushing each side from the other and stopping their further quarrel. A young monkey was bitten by an elder member of his group, and left helpless near the Asram. This little

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fellow came limping on to the Asram at the Virupaksha cave. Hence he was christened *Nondi* (the lame one). When five days later his group came in, they saw he was tended by the Asram, but yet took him back into their group. Thence forward, they would all come in, and get any little things that could be spared for them, outside the Asram: but *Nondi* would proceed right on to my lap. *Nondi* was a scrupulously clean eater. When a plate of rice was placed before him, he would not allow a single particle of food to be scattered outside the plate. If it was, he would pick it up, eat it, and then proceed to the contents of the plate. He was very sensitive though. One day for some reason he threw out some food, and I chid him saying "What! why are you scattering food?" He at once hit me over the eye, and slightly hurt me. As a punishment he was not allowed for some days to approach me and to get on to my lap. But the little fellow cringed and begged hard, and regained his blissful seat. This was his second offence. On the first occasion, when *Nondi* felt irritated at his own cup of hot milk being taken near my lips (to cool it), he struck me over the eye; but as there was no serious hurt and as he at once affectionately re-occupied my lap and cringed as much as to say 'Forget and forgive: let bygones be bygones,' he was excused."

Swami's treatment of monkeys was similar to his treatment of dogs; and much space need not be devoted to details. Two incidents however are worth mention before we pass on to other animals. A raja or chieftain who had exiled or ex-communicated two of his strong adherents who were next in claim to chieftainship was getting very weak, and stayed away or was left near the Asram one day, while the group returned to their lodgings in the plains. Early morning it was reported that a monkey was dying.

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Maharshi went up and found he was in a bad state. He was taken up to the Asram. At the time when the raja died, the two exiled chieftains had come up and were sitting on an adjoining tree. The chieftain died while he was being supported on the Swami's body. Once as the Swami shifted his weight, the raja instinctively bit the Swami. Pointing to the mark on his leg, the Swami smiles and says " I have four such marks of favour from monkey-rajas or chieftains." The raja died uttering a strange groan : and hearing it, the two monkeys jumped up with pain and sorrow, as was evidenced by their cries. The Swami gave the deceased raja all the honours due to a deceased monk or Sanyasi. The body was bathed in milk and again in water : and plenty of sacred ashes were smeared over his body. A new cloth, the shroud or pall, was placed on it, leaving the face uncovered. Camphor was lit up before him, as is done before dying or dead hermits. The deceased raja's face glowed like that of a pious hermit and he was buried in a tomb hard by ; and a stone was placed over the spot, "e'en these bones from insult to protect."

Compared with other creatures that have moved with man, monkeys occupy a low position in the ethical scale. Dogs, for instance, are generally faithful, honest, self-controlled and highly grateful. Monkeys seem to possess few of these virtues. Maharshi, however, cites one instance of monkey gratitude. About twenty years back, on a hot day, he left the Virupaksha cave along with some devotees to make the Hill-circuit. About 1 P. M., they were trudging along, tired and hungry, near the Pachaiamman Koil. A group of monkeys observed them, ran up a *Jambol* tree, vigorously shook down an abundance of ripe fruit and ran away immediately without taking or tasting any fruit. This group had evidently tasted Maharshi's hospitality at his

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Asram and was now repaying the obligation. The party gladly picked up and ate the fruits, and acknowledged that gratitude may sometimes be found among monkeys also—at least in their dealings with Maharshi.

Crows and Squirrels

To shorten this account of animal companions, it is enough to note how the Swami's sympathy gained the confidence of crows, squirrels etc. They would come bringing their young ones along and bite the eatables off his palm and thrust bits into the young ones' mouths. Even a serpent once exhibited similar confidence. Serpents were his fellow-lodgers in several of these caves. "We have come to their residence," he would say, "and we have no right to disturb or trouble them. They do not molest us." On one occasion at the Skandasram, his mother was frightened as a cobra approached her. The Swami however came near it, and the cobra moved out. He followed it as it passed between two rocks. There the passage however ended blindly and it turned its head and coiling its body, stared at him and he also stood and gazed at it in turn. This mutual fascination went on for some minutes: then the serpent quietly crawled on towards the Swami, having gained confidence in him. He waited till it came very near his feet and then withdrew his feet. The cobra then left the place. The Swami though thrice stung by scorpions felt no pain (that is due to the peculiar constitution which he and several others have) and never killed any of these poisonous neighbours. In the Asram snakes and scorpions are, if seized, dropped at a safe distance from the residential quarters, and that is all.

Before closing this chapter, an incident in the Swami's life may be narrated which sets out not merely his powers

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of endurance, but also his readiness to recognise rights in the animal creation as against himself. Some years ago Maharshi had a long walk down-hill from Virupaksha cave and climbed up through an unfrequented track. Here he passed by a bush in which there was a hornets' nest. In his weariness he failed to note it, and as he passed by it carelessly, his left bare thigh grazed against it. Before he advanced a few steps the hornets came buzzing at him and settled on the identical left thigh that had so rudely disturbed them. They dug into his flesh, "Yes. Yes. This is the leg that is guilty. Let it suffer," said the Swami. He did not drive them off, nor did he himself move away from the place till the hornets left him. He bore the excruciating pain bravely—as the working out of a law, the law of Karma. The hornets were only administering, according to their lights, their own law of vendetta, their Mosaic code, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth;" and it was for him to endure the agony in silence. The answer given to his mother (see page 65) was no ingenious philosophy devised for the nonce to ward off a troublesome request, but a rule of life on which he has always acted. "In matters beyond your power to rectify, exercise endurance. 'Endurance! More endurance!! Yet more endurance!!!' is the best rule to secure equanimity and to strengthen the mind for *Samadhi* (ecstatic trance) which involves the entire forgetfulness of external contact." So, bravely enduring the pain, he climbed up and reached his cave, hours later, bearing the seal of hornets' justice stamped in numerous ecchymosed patches on his thigh.

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CHAPTER XXIV

GIRIPRADAKSHINAM, SACRED HILL CIRCUIT

"This is the Hill which God desireth to dwell in.
Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever.
Thou hast ascended on high. Thou hast led captivity captive."

Almost from the time the young Swami came to Tiruvannamalai, and until 1926 he used to perform *Pradakshinam* of the Hill Arunachala several times, every year. One would like to know what this observance means and why the Swami should take to it so frequently.

Round the foot of the hill, there runs a good metalled road about eight miles long with fine shady trees, numerous tanks, and *mantapams* or temples on both sides. This is the "Pradakshinam Road," along which one can see pious crowds moving any day in the week (especially Tuesday mornings). They first bathe in some sacred tank, put on pure clothing, smear the forehead (or even the body) with holy ashes, wear perhaps beads of rudraksha (symbolical of God Siva) and start on their pious circuit. Few start alone, though in many respects, solitude is needed to get the best results. On their way they bow to and circle round many a holy person, temple or image. Some insist on getting a few drops of the holy waters of most tanks on the way sprinkled over their heads. A few insist on bathing in some of these each time they go on their holy circuits. A few insist on rolling over the entire eight miles using their body like a road-roller *(Anga Pradakshinam)*

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and take several days to complete this feat. A few others combine "*Atma Pradakshinam*" with this Giripradakshinam, *i.e.*, eddy round and round themselves on the road at short intervals. Some persons stop and bow to or fall prostrate before God (Arunachala Siva) in the Hill at short intervals of their circuits (some at every step). Various are the ways in which people express their devotion to the hill. Most people however avoid ostentation and extremes, and content themselves with merely walking round the hill slowly, with mind intent on God.

When Maharshi starts, the entire set at the Asram starts off with him as every one is eager to be with him on such occasions. Sometimes they start at night-fall and after a meal and return just at dawn. Sometimes they start during the day and take a day or two to return. One may wonder why in every case so many hours or days should be required to walk eight miles which could be done in three hours. But Maharshi goes out on these circuits mainly to set an example to and benefit others; and Arunachala Purana says that one must walk as slowly as a princess would in the tenth month of her pregnancy and that there should be no sound of footsteps. Besides, Maharshi moves on, often, in a state of Samadhi; such intense ecstasy implies slow and even breath and absence of irritation or perceptible exertion to any muscle or nerve. So he moves at the rate of one mile per hour, and takes rest for some fifteen minutes at the end of each mile; there are suitable places to rest at every mile or even half-mile. While engaged in this circuit he is enjoying the bliss of the Atman and cares not to think of the sounds and sights around or in the centre. He is in the Universal centre, in the only Reality, in the Being of beings.

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Some years back on one of these occasions, Maharshi composed his *Aksharamanamalai*—an acrostic of one hundred and eight stanzas upon Arunachala,—the stanzas beginning with the successive letters of the Tamil alphabet. He composed *Arunachala Ashtakam* on a later occasion. As there is more sequence of thought in these later stanzas, the gist of them may be given here to enable the reader to follow the Swami's thoughts during that circuit.

1. A boy, I came to Thee
Not knowing what Thou wert,
I came up here and saw,
And found Thou wert a hill.

2. But who is then the seer ?
Deep into that I probed.
No seer then remained;
No mind survived at all
To say that this I saw,
Or e'en to say I didn't.
As Dakshinamoorthy once,
Silent Thou taughtst the truth.
Thou dost the same e'en now,
Thou silent standing hill!
If Thou forbear to speak
Who else can voice Thy truth ?

3. Well can one say of Thee
That Thou in form art seen.
Yet truly can he speak
Thee formless and unseen.
Ah! who can know Thy nature ?
Can any plumb Thy depths ?
To sound the Ocean's depth
With measuring tape in hand

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A sugar doll once plunged
And lost itself for e'er.
Thus trying Thee to know,
Thyself must one become.

4. Oh, Thou art That which is;
The only thing that is.
Yet men run here and there
In quest of many Gods!
But raise inquiry's torch
And seek the truth of Gods,
These Gods then fly away
As darkness from the light.
And what remains is Thou,
That gave each creed its God.
Thy light is as the Sun's.
Who sees not Thee is blind.
Oh, mayst thou shed Thy light,
Within my heart for ever!

5. Thou art the central string
Sustaining earthly creeds
E'en as thou dost sustain
Whatever moves or lives.
When mind cremates itself
And inward vision gains,
And further plunges deep,
Ah! then is seen Thy light.
When once Thy light is gained
Avaunt! all earthly fears;
All objects—shows—depart.
The mind's a sensitive plate.
If Brahman's solar rays
Do once upon it fall
'T is sensitive no more;

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Some years back on one of these occasions, Maharshi composed his *Aksharamanamalai*—an acrostic of one hundred and eight stanzas upon Arunachala,—the stanzas beginning with the successive letters of the Tamil alphabet. He composed *Arunachala Ashtakam* on a later occasion. As there is more sequence of thought in these later stanzas, the gist of them may be given here to enable the reader to follow the Swami's thoughts during that circuit.

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   Not knowing what Thou wert,
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   No seer then remained;
   No mind survived at all
   To say that this I saw,
   Or e'en to say I didn't.
   As Dakshinamoorthy once,
   Silent Thou taughtst the truth.
   Thou dost the same e'en now,
   Thou silent standing hill!
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3. Well can one say of Thee
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   Thee formless and unseen.
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   Can any plumb Thy depths ?
   To sound the Ocean's depth
   With measuring tape in hand

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A sugar doll once plunged
And lost itself for e'er.
Thus trying Thee to know,
Thyself must one become.

4. Oh, Thou art That which is;
The only thing that is.
Yet men run here and there
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When once Thy light is gained
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All objects—shows—depart.
The mind's a sensitive plate.
If Brahman's solar rays
Do once upon it fall
'T is sensitive no more;

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There objects of the world
No more impression make.
And is there aught in truth
Beside Thy glorious self?

6. Thou art the only Real,
The centre Light, the Heart.
Thine is the wondrous pow'r
That off from Thee is not.
That power whirls the roll
Of subtle films of mind
Before Thy pure white light,
Thus color'd forms stream forth
Athwart the mental lens,
On Thee, the seeming screen,
As in a cinema show.
The many change and pass;
The one, remainest Thou,

7. Of thoughts, the "I" is first,
'T is only after that,
'You,' 'he,' 'she,' 'it,' 'they,' 'these'
And other thoughts appear.
But if these thoughts arise,
One should not yield to them.
"To whom do these arise?"
Must be his only thought.
The answer comes out clear,—
"These thoughts arise to me."
His question next must be,
"Who is this 'I' and whence?"
Thus let him seek the source
From which the "I" thought springs,—
The source that's nam'd the Heart.
And when the Heart is reach'd,

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Swarajya sure is gain'd,
Where difference is gone
Of self and of not-self,
Of virtue and of vice,
Of sorrow and of joy.
No death is there, nor birth,
No darkness, nor seen light.
All these illusions fly,
Before Thy glorious blaze.

8. The waters of the ocean
By sun and wind upraised
As cloud and rain descend
Down hill and slope as streams
To reach again their source,
The Ocean, and there rest.
The feather'd tribe that leaves
Its leafy home on earth
And restless, on the wing,
E'er wanders far and wide
At last to find its rest,
Its starting place regains.
Oh Arunachal great!
'Tis from Thy wisdom's ocean,
The Jivas* flow'd of yore.
'Tis from thy tree of life,
These birds took flight in air.
Now that they long for rest,
Inquiring what's their source,
They flow or fly to Thee
Their ocean or their tree.

There is nothing more to write about what occupies Maharshi's mind during these circuits; and the rest of this

* 'Jivas' means individual souls.

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chapter will deal with the way in which his entourage conduct themselves and the benefit they derive. His fame is so great and the merit of feeding him is so highly prized that as soon as people hear of his starting on the pilgrimage, they prepare or obtain articles of food and keep waiting at a number of wayside buildings and request him and his group stop and partake of their offerings. Sometimes, they cook there and feed (especially if the circuit is by day) the whole group of the Asram and the others that have joined them. As one might expect, most of these are attracted by the religious merit of the circuit, and the pleasure of sharing the Maharshi's company. A few are always attracted by the "loaves and fishes" and the "pots of manna" and some by love of curiosity. But even fools, who come with grosser ends in view, get some spiritual benefit by observing the noble and inspiring conduct of Maharshi and his chief followers; and the impressions of the circuit soak unnoticed into their subconscious minds to germinate, grow and fructify, years later when the awakening comes.

Let us try and see what the Swami's chief followers do and think on such occasions. It is a trite saying that the same objects are seen by different people differently, by reason of the difference in their equipment, attitude, etc. Some of the Swami's camp have always been quite prosaic, matter of fact men, of whom it may justly be said,

> A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him
> And it was nothing more,

while others might truly say,

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Maharshi with Laxmi

Ramanasramam Hall

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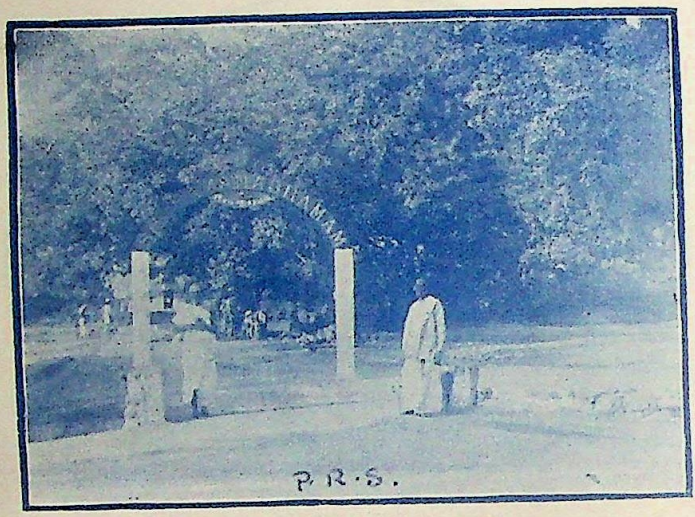
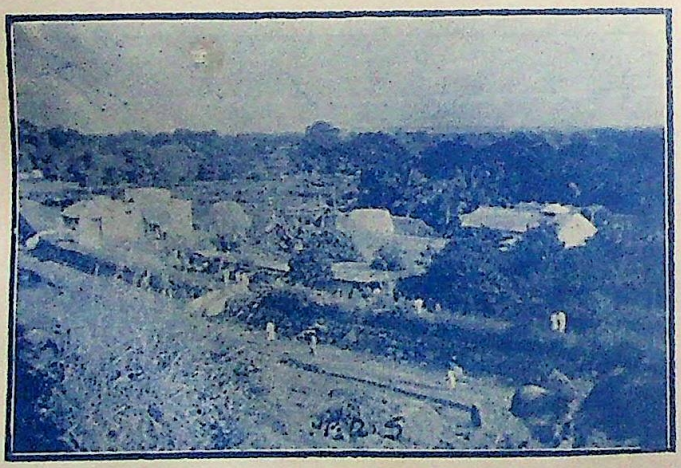


Front entrance to Ramanasramam



Ramanasramam (as seen from the hill)

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To me, the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

We shall take up the latter class and see how they view the holy perambulation and what benefits they derive from it.

To begin with, let us take the hill itself. To the pious and refined devotees, the hill drops its material nature and assumes a spiritual one. It is no longer remembered as earth and rock. Touched by the magic of Devotion, it begins to be suffused with light and stands out as the symbol of the Supreme Lord of the Universe—nay as the Lord Himself. The physical properties of the hill stand out as the attributes of Divinity and excite the deepest and loftiest emotions. What a sense of confidence its unshaken strength and benevolence inspire in their hearts! What serenity and selflessness, what lofty aspiration they feel as they behold its "starry-pointing" peak that sheds heaven's blessed waters on all sides to fertilise and nourish the plains and to give men and beasts alike their food and drink!

What enduring, uniform and all-embracing love towards all sentient creation permeates and transforms them as they find cheetahs and cattle, cobras and cave-dwellers flourishing side by side, for ages on its bosom! And to the very select few that can rise to the heights of *undifferenced*, characterless ecstasy, how helpful are its firmness, and its unity in variety, for realising

"That each who seems a separate whole
Should move his rounds, and fusing all
The skirts of self again, should fall
Re-merging in the general soul."

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Of these few, it might well be said :—

" Their spirits are at peace with all "

" Theirs, the silence of the breast,
Imaginations calm and fair,
The memory like a cloudless air,
The conscience as a sea at rest."

The more they direct their attention to the Hill, the more it absorbs them into itself. Just a few thoughts of its external form, and then lo! they sink deep, deep within. What happens then? Each could say with truth

" The living Soul was flashed on mine,
And mine in this was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,
Æonian music measuring out
The steps of time—the shocks of chance—
The blows of death."

" The mortal limit of the self was loosed,
And passed into the nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touched my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
The gain of such large life as matched with ours
Were sun to spark—unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow world."

This high-pitched ethereal strain, no wonder, lasts not long. Their nature not yet being fully refined, they have to descend to lower planes of thought, in which sense objects soon assert their claims in full. Yet even at these levels they are far above the dust and din of the world. Forms and names may now abound, but they are pure

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lustrous forms, and rapturous holy names—forms and names that extinguish all *other* forms and names. They address themselves now to Lord Arunachala and according to their varying moods praise and dance or pray and weep. One Gajanana, who was for some months with the Swami was full of fervent faith in Sree Hari.* He would constantly sing songs from Srimad Bhagavata and would dance in his joy most of the way round the hill. Others pour forth their soul in the language of Sivanandalahari, Tevaram, Tiruppugazh, Aksharamanamalai, etc., aided by cymbals and tambur, drum (Mridangam) and fiddle.

The last, but by no means the least, of the pilgrims is the one who goes on repeating silently the dear Lord's name (such as the *Panchakshari*) and by dint of meditation becomes himself the object of his own "thought." Then really thought is not. In enjoyment it expires.

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* One need not be surprised at his singing of Sri Mahavishnu in this Sivakshetram and when going round Siva. There is no intolerance or sharp difference between the two cults of Siva and Vishnu here. The temple and hill were originally Maha-Vishnu's. Even now Sri Vaishnavites regard the hill as Sudarsana the sacred wheel (of Time perhaps) in the hands of God. And just behind the image of Siva in the big temple, is the image of Sri Venugopala (a form of Sri Mahavishnu) in whose name the temple site still stands registered.

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CHAPTER XXV

A DAY AT THE ASRAM

शान्तमिदमाश्रमपदं

Solemn stillness reigns in this abode of hermits.

विश्वासोपगमादभिन्नगतयश्शब्दं सहन्ते मृगाः

The animals here, emboldened by their confidence hear (human) sounds with unaltered pace.

—*Sakuntala.*

Let us peep into the Asram of Maharshi to watch its daily life. There are special days in which it is very busy, when it attracts very large numbers—such as the *Kartikai* Festival, the *Jayanti day*, *i.e.*, Maharshi's birthday, and the anniversary of his mother's ascension. On the last two occasions over a thousand persons are fed, there is special and prolonged pooja in the Matrubhuteswara temple, which is the tomb of the sainted mother of Maharshi, and generally there is the piper's nagaswaram or other music. On his birthday, Maharshi is visited by large numbers of resident and non-resident disciples, and is placed amidst numerous garlands and festoons on a decorated dais, and the loving disciples swarm to his feet and spend some hours in his company. There is feasting with choice delicacies and plenty of other dishes which serve to remind all of the blessed day which ushered this great, benevolent, and enlightened soul into this world.

There are a few things to note about Maharshi's conduct on these special days. When thousands are to be fed, he is apprehensive that nice things will be provided

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and the complete course served only for the first or second set of persons who sit for their meal, and that the last set may be given only a few diluted sauces and tiny bits of the nice things. More than four hundred or five hundred cannot be accommodated at a time, and the total number fed goes up to two thousand or more. So he refuses to sit up his meal till the last set is served. His unvarying principle when anything is prepared at the Asram or brought for up by any votaries for pleasing his palate, is never to touch anything unless there is a sufficient quantity to go round, *i.e.*, to offer at least an equal share with himself to all present in the premises. Some one brings up occasionally a cup of very nice "Turkish coffee" or a little *halwa* and says to the Swami, "It is very good. So Swami may take it." The Swami immediately answers "Why should I? Am I not quite happy without it? If I am to take anything, all must take it," and the proffered article is returned without being tasted, or is offered to the dogs or other animals present. The Swami is never elated at a bounteous banquet nor depressed at a Spartan fare. In fact one rule of his at meal makes the former rather trying to him. He is observing (from the days of his boyhood) the rule never to throw away anything served on his plate, but to consume patiently all things served. He would certainly be better off if he reversed his rule, and ate only what was absolutely necessary and rejected all the rest. But that is the outsiders' medical advice which ignores the sentiments that underlie the Swami's vow or rule. Another noticeable feature of the Swami when he sits at a feast or dinner is that he inquires after and sees to an impartial service to all present, even the poorest, and meanest—if meanness among men can exist in his presence—before he begins to

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take his meal. If any one refuses to take food, he offers him fruit or something else that he can take.

One more fact about these special occasions may be noted. The Swami avoids all pompous and grand arrangements in reference to his own person. In fact, when the first celebration of his birthday was being arranged for by his devotees, in 1912, he objected, giving his reasons in a couple of stanzas which he then composed in Tamil :—

பிறந்தநா ளேதோ பெருவிழாச் செய்வீர்
பிறந்ததெவ னுமென்று பேணிப்—பிறந்திறத்த
லின்றென்று மொன்று யிலகுபொரு ளிற்பிறந்த
வன்றே பிறந்தநா ளாம்.
பிறந்தநா ளேனும் பிறப்புக் கழாது
பிறந்தநா ளுற்சவமே பேண—லிறந்த
பிணத்திற் கலங்கரிக்கும் பெட்பென்றே தன்னை
யுணர்ந்தொடுங்க றானே யுணர்வு.

1. Ye, that wish to celebrate the birthday, seek Ye first whence was your birth. That indeed is one's birthday when he enters that which transcends birth and death, —the Eternal Being.

2. At least on one's birthday, one may mourn his entry into this world (Samsara). To glory in it and celebrate it, on the other hand, is like delighting in decorating a corpse. To seek one's self and merge in the Self—that is wisdom.

The devotees' insistence that they required it to satisfy their needs and that the Swami might remain unconcerned prevailed; and ever since, the Jayanti celebration has been held every year. Similarly when Perumalswami and some others desired to have a life-size bronze-statue of the Swami, he did not raise any objection to the creation of such an aid to devotion,—though he did not care to have a

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statue. Consequently, one was made at great cost by the artist Nagappa and has recently been installed in the town of Tiruvannamalai. Some other Swamis have a regular *Abhishekam* and *Pooja, i.e.*, pots of water, milk, curds, oil, honey, sandal paste etc., are poured over them or their feet as they are poured over sacred images. The Swami never permits such things. The Swami does not even permit camphor to be lighted or cocoanut to be broken before him, as is done before idols. But his views do not always prevail. Strangers and over-zealous admirers who fail to see the reason for the above rules, violate them not infrequently. They daily light up camphor, break cocoanuts and praise him with a hundred and eight epithets or names (as they praise any God) in their homes, using his picture for worship. When they go to the Asram, they fail to see why the original should not be worshipped in exactly the same way. However some disciple in attendance often dissuades such votaries and succeeds mostly in saving the Swami from the ordeal.

As for *Padaseva, i.e.*, the actual touching of the Swami's feet and carrying the dust or washed water thereof to the votary's head and lips and pouring praise in his ears attributing to him omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc., these occasionally happen and the Swami submits to all these. It is the sacrifice he has to make for "service of the world," "*Lokasangraha,*" suiting oneself to the needs and ideas of the world has been preached in the Bhagavad Gita, Ch. III. The votary cannot rise high in his spiritual flights unless he idealises his Guru, and transfigures the physical Guru into something high, into the Divinity. The closing sentence of Swetaswatara Upanishad,

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यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।
तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥

"These teachings (of the Upanishad) will shine forth to (*i.e.*, be readily understood and realised by) him who has faith in Iswara, the Lord, and the same faith in his teacher as in the Lord,"

distinctly encourages the identification of the teacher with God or Brahman, by the aspirant in his struggle for realisation (though to the realised pupil, *i.e.*, the Jnani, all distinction of himself, God and Guru ceases). Hence the Swami does not damp the ardent votary's spirit in any matter essential for the latter's advancement. Gradually and gently however, every votary is made to see the Guru's point of view also.

The Swami sets an example to all in his eating as in so many other matters. He never exhibits any anxiety, depression or elation, at anything that may happen.

न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत् प्राप्यचाप्रियं

i.e., "Be not elated on attaining the desired or desirable objects; nor distressed at the contrary" says the Gita; and the Swami who acts on this principle every moment of his life, shows his equanimity best at these special gatherings. Some "notable," (say a Judge or a Raja) turns up. He is not shown any special consideration which is denied to others; and the Swami does not feel fluttered or flurried over the arrival or departure of such. The late Rajah of Ramnad came and stood awhile after rendering obeisance to the Swami. If people needlessly continue to stand in the Swami's presence, he bids them be seated. So the Swami bade the Raja take his seat. But out of great regard to the Swami, all the time that the Raja

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stayed at the Asram, *i.e.*, for fifteen minutes, he continued standing and then departed. When the late Hon'ble Sir M. C. T. Muthia Chettiar came up, the Nattukottai Chettiar who accompanied him announced him as (புதுவரனி) the capitalist of Kanadukathan. Both sat for fifteen minutes on the floor in the Swami's presence; and the Swami spoke not a word. When they departed, the Swami was informed by some one present that the visitor was a knight, a member of the local Legislative Council and one of the richest bankers of South India. The Swami received the information with as much interest, as if he had been told that Tata's shares in the Bombay market had slightly fallen or that copper was steady. A Nattukottai Chetti's agent told the Swami that if he only agreed to accept the gift, his principal would provide two cows, and a large fund to maintain the cows and their keeper, out of the interest. The Swami drily remarked that the Asram was not needing cows, and that a cow would be an easy prey to the cheetas which not infrequently visit the Asram. The local District Superintendent of Police (the brother of a Raja) came up at the time of Maharshi's birthday, offered to send up things required (if any), and asked the Swami what he might send up. He was told promptly that nothing was needed; whatever had been sent up, was being distributed to all comers.

A very interesting thing to note is how the Swami conducts himself at music. All of a sudden, some devotee thinks that some songstress protegee of his who is to make her debut in the world should auspiciously begin her performance in Maharshi's presence and comes up, thinking incidentally that he is pleasing the Swami thereby. Maharshi has some appreciation of music but is not fond of it (as Seshadriswami was). He sits through the performance,

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statue-like, and never shakes his head to express appreciation nor moves a finger to beat time, and never opens his lips either to approve or criticise or call for any particular note or tune. When the music is over, he smiles to the person responsible for bringing up the music, or (if there is no such person) to the musician, and the smile is taken to mean "Thank you." Recently a rich Mudaliar brought up a young fair-looking dancing girl in silk and lace to sing her first public songs before Maharshi. At the end of the performance, after the latter had smiled his "Thanks" to the Mudaliar, the lassie stood up, smiled, smirked and moved about full of her self-consciousness (in the worldly sense) striking up attitudes and making graceful movements as though she would charm and capture the hearts of the beholders. But so far as Maharshi was concerned, he was totally unmoved and unaffected, treating it perhaps as a mere flesh-covered skeleton or a galvanised corpse that was playing its tricks. Maharshi explained the secret of his attitude towards music, later, in explaining to some disciples, how worldly objects are to be faced, and how a contemplation of unity is possible amidst the diverse pictures that present themselves to the senses and the mind of the aspirant, even at the time of devotion. Maharshi said "When there are various notes played or tunes sung by the musician, if you keep attending to the *Sruti*, *i.e.*, the accompanying tambur or harmonium with its monotonous burden, your attention is not distracted by the diverse notes or tunes; similarly in the world which is full of sights and sounds, keep attending to the *Sruti*, the one Reality that Vedas proclaim, and then your concentration is undisturbed." To one that strives to attain concentration, this advice may not seem practical. Its real point is that freedom from distraction

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depends on the strength of one's interest in the subject selected for concentration and one's will-power in that matter ; and that the clear way to increase will-power is to will the increase, *i.e.*, by constant *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya*. But the advice incidentally shows how Maharshi keeps himself unconcerned,

> With notes of many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
> With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
> The melting voice through mazes running,
> Untwisting all the chains that tie
> The hidden soul of harmony.

He merely attends to the uniform *Sruti*, the one sound, and escapes the bonds of the many that "change and pass."

Let us look into the Asram on ordinary days, when there is no special function and no rush of crowds. Maharshi spends almost all his time waking or sleeping on the sofa in the northern hall. He is available there, all the hours of the day and night, and to all comers. None requires to be announced or to get permission to go into his presence. None need fear to go, bow, and take a seat anywhere, and put any question regarding anything that oppresses him or her. People often go in and praise him, and then pour their woes into his ears (incidentally it may be added that all that is addressed to him in person can equally be found in the various sorts of letters he receives from time to time). One comes and praises him in Sanskrit verse, another in plain Tamil prose, a third in Telugu or Malayalam song or *Keertan**. Several go to him heart-sore. "I have lost my only child. Of what use is life to

* Kirtan is song set to music.

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me? How am I to get on?" says one. Another has lost in his business and is faced with bankruptcy. A third has been deprived of his rights in some property and wants the Swami's blessings to win a law suit. A fourth (and many come of that type) is a childless lady and attends daily importuning the Swami mentally, to exorcise the "barren spirit." A fifth has disease—often of an incurable type, and prays either mentally or openly for a cure. A sixth is a neurotic with unaccountable fears and wants a recipe or a blessing to drive these away. Some hysterical and obsession cases turn up. They begin to weep and wave their heads sometimes. Mostly all depart, solaced or strengthened in some degree at least. Even among those who have a religious turn, curious types come up, in person or by letter. One writes from distant north (Ceded Districts) that he is assured of the Swami's power to save him, and that the Swami must positively grant him *Darsan* (vision of himself) by magical or mystic power at the writer's village on a date fixed in the letter. Another says that his sorrows are great, and that the Swami must somehow remove them. Among those who write to or visit the Swami, few care to go in for self-analysis, few study even the most elementary books on religion or philosophy dealing with the problems vexing them; few have any definite course of earnest devotion or practice of Vichara or Yoga. Most of them turn up with a vague desire to see the BrahmanaSwami or Maharshi noted for his selflessness and equality or equanimity (समत्वं). They put some superficial question, are easily met by a few simple answers, and go away without serious thought. Occasionally some sincere souls turn up just requiring a little encouragement, just a few words to clear points or explain experiences as yet unintelligible to them. Maharshi's answers to these are generally very

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apposite, and fitting, and proceed on such high levels that others who hear, do not understand the talk. The account of Natananandar (see Chapter XXVII) furnishes a good illustration. Hardly any of these conversations have been reported or preserved. A few devotees appear to have a special aptitude to rouse psychic power, in Maharshi, power perhaps unconscioulу exercised in some cases. To illustrate this, the instance of Kulumani Narayana Sastri, a devout *bhakta* (i.e., disciple) of both Maharshi and Seshadriswami, who had received noticeable marks of favour and considerable attention to the development of his detachment *(Vairagya)* and illumination *(Jnana)* at the hands of the latter may be cited. A person who was so highly honoured by Seshadriswami cannot be unreliable. Even apart from that, he is even now in our midst, leading a saintly and dedicated life ; and his words command great respect.

Some eighteen years ago, K. N. Sastri went to see Maharshi on the Hill. He took with him a bunch of plantains which he carried first to Arunachala temple to be offered to God Arunachala. On the way he saw the huge image of Ganapati in front of that temple and he *mentally* offered *one* of the fruits to Ganapati, without plucking it from the bunch, and at the temple offered the whole bunch to God Arunachala and took it back and gave it to Maharshi, saying nothing about his mental offer. When it was about to be taken inside the cave by a disciple, Maharshi stopped him and said "Stop, let us take the fruit offered to Ganapati." K. N. Sastri was taken aback with this remarkable thought reading. He concluded that Maharshi had the power described as चित्तसंवित् *chitta samvit* in Patanjali's Yoga sutra I, 35 —power which includes clairvoyance, telepathy, etc. He

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carried with him his recent and as yet unknown composition in Sanskrit, a prose abridgment of Valmiki Ramayana and without letting any one know of it he thus composed a mental address (in Sanskrit words) to Maharshi "To you with your power of *chitta samvit*, a statement of the purpose of my visit would be needless repetition." At once Maharshi (adverting to his purpose) said "ராமாயணத்தை வாசிக்கிறது தானே," "Why not take out (your) Ramayana and read it?" Sastri's object was to secure the அரங்கேற்றல், *i.e.*, have the first formal reading of his work in public before Maharshi; and he rejoiced at the fulfilment of his desire and the manifestation of the powers of Maharshi.

Maharshi also showed him how familiar were crows and squirrels with himself. He called out to a crow that had brought its young one, and the crow came and picked up eatables off his palm and offered these to its little one. With the remaining bits he moved on to a tree hard by, where a squirrel nibbled them off his hand.

Several other devotees have constantly noted that Maharshi addresses them on the very matter on which they seek his help, without their expressing themselves. He himself has mentioned that not infrequently when objects are being brought to him he is talking of securing the identical articles. These perhaps show that particular persons and circumstances call forth his various powers. It is assuredly as unreasonable to disbelieve the phenomena on the ground that some alone have found them as it is to impute partiality to him on that account. Nor is "chance" an explanation of so many instances.

A few light souls have occasionally dropped in, to test Maharshi's learning or skill in dialectics as though he was a

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champion or knight-in-arms ready to battle against all comers in intellectual or spiritual jousts. Though he has many important religious works (like portions of the Upanishads, V. Chudamani, etc.) in Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, etc., at his fingers' ends, he never cares to display his learning. When these swashbucklers arrive, he remains quiet in *Samadhi*; and not infrequently the spirit of peace enters them, and they return sadder and wiser. A few put useless questions like the following, "Herbert Spencer and Sri Arabindo Ghose differ on the question, whether in the march of evolution, some forms or links that are suggested by the principle of uniformity and continuity (*Natura non facit saltum, i.e.*, Nature does not make jumps) can be dispensed with by Nature. Does Swamiji think that evolution can leap over such chasms?" The Maharshi does not sit at his Asram as a Professor of Biology or Natural Science, to solve all conundrums. He maintains silence in such cases, thereby pointing out the inappropriateness of such questions—especially those which do not affect the religious progress or happiness of the questioner. But he entertains neither ill-will nor anger and shows no disgust. Mention has already been made of one who asked him if he had seen God, and if it was a sin to kill a tiger, (noting a tiger-skin under his seat). If however the question serves a useful purpose (even though the questioner's attitude is more critical than reverent) Maharshi is gracious enough to answer. Questions of fate and free will, questions of the order of creation, whether the seed precedes the tree or the tree the seed, and similar questions are propounded; and he deals with them in his own way. When the former question was raised, he

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composed a stanza* in his "Ullathu Narpathu"—"The Real Forty"

which means that "these controversies as to which is superior—Fate or Free will—arise only to those who look not into the root of both. If one however knows the Self, the root and cause of both, he transcends both, and will never again entertain thoughts of either." In other words, Maharshi cuts the ground underneath the questioner, by pointing out that the problem arises only in the phenomenal world and does not oppress the Self-Realiser. The writer of these pages sitting in his presence, and translating into Tamil the life and sayings of Swami Vivekananda, wondered if any one, *e.g.*, Maharshi, could by a touch or a glance give him (the writer) the peculiar feeling or perception that all things are really of one substance, which Vivekananda derived by a single touch of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and whether such *Siddhi* (or miracle working power) was not worth having. Echammal at the same time put him the question point blank if *Siddhi* could be attained by us. Maharshi then, by way of answer to both, composed another stanza † in the same poem :—

which means "It is the realisation and firm adherence to that which is ever existent (ever ready-made, so to speak) that deserves the name Siddhi or attainment. Any other attainment

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*விதிமதி மூல விவேக மிலார்க்கே
விதிமதி வெல்லும் விவாதம்—விதிமதிகட்
கோர்முதலாந் தன்னை யுணர்ந்தா ரவைதணந்தார்
சார்வரோ பின்னுமவை சாற்று.

† சித்தமா யுள்பொருளைத் தேர்ந்திருத்தல் சித்திபிற
சித்தியெலாஞ் சொப்பனமார் சித்திகளே—நித்திரைவிட்
டோர்ந்தா லவைமெய்யோ வுண்மைநிலை நின்றுபொய்ம்
தீர்ந்தார் தியங்குவரோ தேர். [மை

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(*Siddhi*), say, of magical powers, is like attaining them in dreams. When one wakes up, does he really possess these powers ? Will those who have brushed aside the unreal and established themselves in the Real be tempted by these"? In this way, he draws all people back to the central or cardinal truth that one must realise the Self, and that that alone is happiness, and the thing to be attained. Incidentally he is prepared to solve and does solve other problems, if connected with the main question even remotely. Mr. N. N., a Madura Vakil, wanted to know if the various Gods, devils and spirits really existed, and Maharshi answered him "Yes, but that is only '*Vyavaharika Satya*,' phenomenal existence like your own."

N. N. :—Then Siva and other gods are not mere fictions like a "hare's horn ?"

M. :—No.

N. N. :—If they are like us, then they must be subject to dissolution (*Pralaya*) ?

M. :—No. If you can become a *Jnani*, a *mukta* and the immortal Brahman, is it not reasonable to suppose that Siva, etc., who are infinitely wiser than you, have such *Jnana* and are the Immortal *Brahman* ?

Amritanatha asked if Siddhas exist even now, if there is a Siddha world, and if so what powers they wield. Maharshi replied that there are Siddhas even now wielding equal powers with Maheswara.

As it is not possible in a few pages to note all that Maharshi said to his numerous interlocutors, as no Boswell noted them, and as his discourses are found elsewhere, these will suffice for the present. Let us note what is being daily done at the Asram everyday by him and his disciples.

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Maharshi gets up between 3 and 4 A. M. and that means, the others mostly get up at the same time. After attending to ablutions, he sits up in his sofa, and some disciples begin the day with a chant of his praise or of திருப்பள்ளியெழுச்சி, திருவெம்பாவை or other parts of a long poem extending over 1500 stanzas "Sri Ramana Sannidhimurai" by Muruganar or a chant of Maharshi's Tamil poems in praise of Arunachala. By 5 or 6 A.M. a regular stream of visitors pours in; after an early bath in the neighbouring wells, they go up, prostrate before the Swami and go away. Then follows often an adjournment to the dining hall for a light morning coffee with "*idli*" or "*Uppuma*"—dishes peculiar to South India, of rice and black gram, or semolina. Then he returns to his seat; and the visitors pour in again. Among the disciples there is mostly a division of labour. Some cull flowers, and make garlands; others fetch water and prepare *naivedya* (*i.e.*, food offering) for the Pooja. Some go through the ceremony of Pooja at his mother's *samadhi*. Some are engaged in literary tasks,—composing, correcting, translating, and editing the works of or about Maharshi, and in rare cases works by or about other saints and holy personages. Fetching and preparation of vegetables and other articles for cooking are attended to by a few disciples, and is superintended by his younger brother "Chinnaswami," *i.e.*, Niranjanananda.* The Swami also occasionally assists at these tasks as also in cooking, thereby securing some exercise for his limbs, and setting an excellent example of diligence and humility. Dignity of labour is plain to all, when they see the Maharshi cutting vegetables, after extracting

*Niranjanananda Swami is now the authorised agent or manager of the Asram and superintends all temporal work, under the title *Sarvadhikari*.

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the fibres, long before dawn and attending to the due mixture of the various components for the cooking. He does not stop with that. When there are no visitors, and when there is no literary or other work on hand, he polishes walking sticks, repairs kamandalas (water bowls), stitches leafplates, copies works in clear type-like print, binds books and note-books, and does other useful work.

Then follows breakfast between 11 A.M. and 12 noon which has been sufficiently described. Then the usual work and rest ; and some tiffin is forthcoming about 3 P.M. From that time (and sometimes even in the mornings) visitors come with sweet-meat, fruits, candy, etc. ; and after Swami takes a bit, these are at once distributed as *prasada* (blessed gift) to all present. Many new visitors to the Asram are agreeably surprised to note the sweet bits that are always being distributed, and the thorough equality and cordiality that characterise these gifts. The donor here does not fancy (or behave so as to suggest that he fancies) that he is superior and that the recipient is inferior. It is " *Prasada* " going round ; and all concerned have "*Prasanna manas*", *i.e.*. a happy and contented frame of mind. There is no trace of the inferiority complex in the recipients. Many newcomers wonder how it is possible for the Swami to be for ever giving them good things to eat, good example to copy, and good philosophy or philosophical explanations for them to take in and absorb, thereby promoting health, happiness and wisdom. The orthodox Hindu is directed to observe and often observes the scriptural direction to "bless the donor", *e.g.*, on receipt of food, to say from the bottom of his heart "**अन्नदाता सुखीभव**", *i.e.*, "Happiness befall thee, donor of food !" Thousands of such good wishes are poured forth ; every now and then, people bless Maharshi, and those who are his donors, for such gifts, and pray that

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he may be long spared to spread his beneficent light and influence at the foot of this holy Hill, and that his donors may attain all lawful objects they may desire. But it is not for the sake of such thanks or good wishes that he distributes all good things that come up to him. Is it for reward or recognition that the sun takes up vapour of water from everywhere, and stirs up the monsoon winds to carry the clouds everywhere, so that the rains may pour and bless all alike?

At the close of the day, comes "Meditation time" which, interrupted by a dinner (and sometimes by the disciples' recitations) may extend to 9 P.M. or to the time for sleep. The importance of the subject demands a separate chapter.

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CHAPTER XXVI

MEDITATION AT THE ASRAM

Oh, Thus by faith,—till darkness' end,
We walk with the Guru—our dearest friend,
Till safe we tread the fields of light.
Where faith is lost,—in perfect sight.
I envy not the rich their joys—
*Soham—Hamsah
I covet not earth's glittering toys.
Soham—Hamsah.
Earth can no lasting bliss bestow.
"Fading" is stamped on all below.
Mine is a joy no end can know.
Hamsah—Soham.

—*Adapted from Sankey*

प्रणवो धनुः शरोह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते ।
अप्रमत्तेन वेद्धव्यं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत् ॥
यस्मिन् द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्ष मोतं मनः सह प्राणैश्च सर्वैः ।
तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मान मन्यावाचो विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः ॥
ओमित्येवं ध्यायथ आत्मानं स्वस्तिवः पाराय तमसः परस्तात् ॥
॥ मुण्डकोपनिषत् ॥ II, 2

which means: The pranava (OM) is the bow; The arrow is (your) self; The target is the (Supreme) Brahman. Aim steadily, deliberately and hit the mark. Like the arrow get imbedded, lost therein and become That.

In that (pranava), Earth and the Sky, intervening space, mind and all vital forces are interwoven. The one, Self is that. Realise that. From other talk, refrain. This is the bridge that leads to Immortality.

Medidate on Self as "OM." May you thus safely cross beyond darkness. (Mundaka. Upa. II, 2.)

* *Soham* means "He is I:" *Hamsah* means "I am He."

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Persons closely moving with Maharshi, who have made the best use possible of his presence and company are apt to regard what has been covered by the preceding chapters as bushels of chaff and may heave a sigh of relief on reading the above head note. After all, they may think, is this writer coming to the kernel, the pith of the subject. But even this hopefulness perhaps may rapidly fade away at the rather superficial way in which this chapter deals with its subject; and the writer would dissuade them from forming high hopes and expectations. The writer's aged muse must apologise for touching on a subject above her powers, and must request that the will to do justice may be taken for actual justice to the subject.

Maharshi is regarded by many as a Sphynx. He speaks little and only as to what is asked. He is mostly silent. His works are cryptic and are capable of diverse interpretations. Saktas go to him and think he is a Sakta, Saivas take him for a Saiva, Srivaishnavas find nothing in him inconsistent with their Visishtadwaitic ideal. Moslems and Christians have found in him elements of their "true faith." Who can say what his faith is? Only those who have analysed and understood his attitude and realisation on matters of supreme, ultimate interest. How few indeed are there of this class among his visitors! More than twenty years back, Seshadriswami, a great *tapaswi*, with remarkable *vairagya* and high spiritual culture, tried in vain to see through this Swami. If the giant Seshadriswami with his extraordinary training, acuteness and powers of thought-reading could not make out his "mentality" or state, how can puny souls make it out? Yet having started on a biography, one has to face the task. **आरब्धस्यान्तगमनं द्वितीयं बुद्धिलक्षणम्**, *i.e.*, "It is the next best mark of wisdom to complete what was begun."

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The theory of meditation and Self-Realisation has been frequently set forth in books on Yoga and Vedanta, and clearly explained by Maharshi at least from 1901-02 as may be seen from G. Seshier's note book.* The instrument employed, at any rate, at the beginning is the *antahkarana, i.e., manas, buddhi, chitta* and *ahankara, i.e., mind, intellect, desire* and *personality*, the totality of which is often termed the mind. This instrument has to be structurally improved and developed and given the most favourable conditions for the task before it. The mind unaccustomed to concentrate must be bent to that task constantly, so that concentration might become easy and natural to it. Will-power develops by exercise quite like any other aspect, side, faculty,† or power. Repeatedly taking interest in what repels one at first, develops one's power to endure or face the undesirable,—to overcome repulsion. Frequently steadying one's mind on a particular point when diverse other attractions or distractions operate on the senses and mind will enable one to concentrate even in a fish market. Favourable conditions are, however, necessary in the case of beginners, and must be first attended to diligently. These can be dispensed with later on, when the will is thoroughly strengthened and concentration is made easy, immediate, steady and effective. These conditions relate to all things that affect mental operations in general and concentration in particular. First as to the place selected, it must be clean, peaceful, and free from all distracting noise. That is why a forest, hill,

* Now published as "Vichara Sangraham" (in Tamil).

† Modern Psychology denies the existence of separate faculties in the mind. That is why other terms also are employed. For *practical* purposes, the term "faculty" may be retained—though it must be remembered that it is the whole mind or person that is really engaged in the work.

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river bank, cave or corner of a huge temple is generally chosen. Even a quiet room in one's house will do. Next, a firm seat is placed, not too high, (for fear of a fall) nor too low (for fear of damp, insects, etc.). For example, as mentioned in Bhagavad Gita, Chapter VI, 10-15 a grass mat is spread or a grass bundle is laid flat, over that a deer-skin and over that again a cloth is spread. On this the aspirant may sit in any posture convenient to him. But as far as possible, the body must be kept erect, in a seated posture, with eyes looking straight (horizontally) at the tip of the nose. The mind must remain calm—unagitated by any fear and undisturbed by sex or other attractions, or thoughts, or by fatigue, drowsiness, restlessness, etc.; and especially one finds it necessary to regulate sleep and food, avoiding all excess, and to live a pure, good and simple life, on plain *satvic* fare. The thoughts must be brought under control.

The best way advised to keep off all distracting thoughts is to occupy the mind positively with one thing, *e.g.*, some object of devotion like Sri Krishna's or Rama's figure, and intently concentrating on that alone. One must throw into this meditation his entire heart without any reservation. The personality of the meditator must be merged in the thought (or form) chosen for meditation and disappear into it like an arrow-head in the target.* The breath becomes regulated and tranquil thereby; and one need not worry about it; enough that he is bent on meditation. But where a man lacks earnestness and force of personality, and is much distracted by conflicting currents of thought,—especially thoughts of worldly temptations, *e.g.*, **कामिनी कांचन, यशः सुखं.** *i.e.*, sex,

* As described in Mundaka Upa. quoted at the head of this Chapter.

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wealth, fame, pleasure etc., he may call into his aid breath regulation, for a period; attention to breath regulation, especially to the retention of breath, for a fixed period, at first and developing it gradually will smooth his ruffled mind. But as *Pranayama* is a mere step in aid of a great purpose, Maharshi frequently reminds people not to waste much time and effort on that alone to the detriment of the main objective (*Lakshya*), viz., self-realisation.

The question what exactly is to be meditated on, is frequently put to Maharshi by his disciples and others that resort to him for help. He allows them mostly to select whatever they have previously taken up as their *Lakshya* or object for meditation. Anything will do. If a man has already started meditation with God Ganapati, Subrahmanya, Kali, Siva, Rama, Jesus, Buddha, Pranava, Sakti bijam, Panchakshari, Ashtakshari, a lamp's flame, his mother or his guru, as his object, Maharshi tells him to go on with it with full faith, as that will ultimately lead him to the goal. But when one comes up with what is practically a mental *tabula rasa* without any practice, or predilections, he advises the adoption of the method which proved a success in his own case. He had the worship *(Upasana)* of Siva and by Siva's grace he was led on to inquire "who am I?", and meditating deeply on that, he entered into *Samadhi* with the mind centered on the Self. So he tells people to think out and follow intently the quest "who am I?" In an earlier chapter are given some steps in the quest (which admit of description) leading to Self-Realisation (which admits of none). Inquire first how you think of "I" or yourself. Most people adopt the cut and dry analysis of one's self as body and soul, the body including the organs and senses, the breath and other vital activities, the term soul or mind

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including sensation, perception, memory, judgment and various other mental operations.

No apology is offered for repeating this matter as it is the pith and core of Maharshi's teaching. To understand and appreciate him, one has to get a good grip of the theory and actually practise this process; and it is a matter which has to be dinned into one, times without number, before one can make much progress in inward absorption or soul realisation.

The question then is "Am I this body, this fleshy cage, these senses ?" Obviously one is not these, as he parts with these piecemeal or wholesale, and yet retains his feeling of self. At any rate "I" cannot remain after death!, some one may remark. Well, "Death of what? What is it that dies ?" are the counter questions to be first solved. Most people agree that they pass on from one body to another after death. Some people have experience even in this life of leaving their bodies in sleep, visiting distant scenes, noting what occurs there and after waking up verifying the truth of the visions they had while asleep. Others are made to do this through hypnotic trance. These and similar facts enable one to infer that the body, breath, life and vital activities are not one's self, though one is apt to identify himself with his physical or animal life (as in fact he often identifies himself erroneously with the body).

If the body and life are not one's self, one may perhaps conclude that he must be his mind or mental modes. At any rate this is coming nearer the mark. But taking mind to mean the sum total of one's thoughts, one feels almost instinctively that he is not his thoughts. One feels "I entertain the thoughts, push them out, again give them

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room to re-enter. I send out and select various thoughts" and can well conclude that these thoughts do not mean my self but are mere objects with which the self, the subject, is sporting. But even the subject seems to be a thought or inextricably inter-mixed with thoughts. So one may first try and eliminate purely objective thoughts in his quest. All thoughts other than "I" may thus be regarded as objective and as much outside the Self as the external world is. The question then is: What is the residuary subject, this stem, or root thought "I"—which is termed personality? Having already belittled the intellect by including it among the objects and treating it at best as an inferior organ of this self, as unidentifiable with the self, one is faced with the question if the intellect throws light on the nature of this "I." To some extent it does. When object after object is eliminated with the remark "This is but an object, a possession of the self, a thing which rises and falls, which changes, passes away and returns, and which is consequently not 'I' and not the Real" (*i.e.*, with the remark नेति नेति "Not this." "Not this,") the intellect is playing its part and rendering service. This service is exhausted with this negative course, this cleansing of the room (*i.e.*, its "purification") to fit it for the "occupation" or the "coming" of the Pure Self. The final service of the intellect is to eliminate itself, saying "I too am only the instrument of the subject and am not the subject itself."

That pure Self is not sensed by the intellect. The eye sees not the Self, though the Self sees all else with the eye. The intellect is similar therefore to the physical eye which sees only outside things. In some very extraordinary cases, the eye, so to speak, is turned round on itself. That is the "आवृत्तचक्षुः (inward turned eye) spoken of in

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Katha. Upa. II 4 (1). Strictly speaking, it is not the eye or (to drop the metaphor) the intellect that sees the Self. Something else is there, in and as, the Self, or its part or aspect, the intuition, the self-perceptive, self illuminating power of the Self, the power being indistinguishable from the Self. We shall not try to describe what is indescribable. Seers have long ago declared that speech and thought retire baffled in their attempt to see, approach, and grasp the Self (*vide* Taitti. Upa. 114 यतोवाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह). So one contents himself with a description of the preliminaries of meditation and leaves the reader to realise the rest by Self-realisation. The mother when questioned by her little girl of five, what the joys and pains of maternity and child-birth are like, smiles and says "Wait and see for yourself by your own experience." The "birth" of this Atman, *i.e.*, its realisation in one's self and all, as pure 'bliss-consciousness-existence' can be understood only by actual realisation.

But the external circumstances of meditation can be set down here in greater detail. What any visitor who stays a while with a view to catch a glimpse of the real life of the Asram may observe, what makes it really worth while visiting, may be described here at some more length.

Most visitors would have noticed that Maharshi seldom talks. When visitors come, he just notes who is come, and keeps on his "contemplative" attitude. His eyes are fixed, his breath is even and inaudible, and his mind evidently in *Samadhi*. Especially if the visitor comes for getting help to settle his own thoughts and diving into himself, Maharshi stops talking and gives him the needed tip or help. As Maharshi has said often, the proximity of great ones is one of the means to attain breath regulation *(Kumbhaka)*. The

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great ones in their peaceful meditation maintain harmonious breathing. Those intently watching them with a view to attain *Samadhi*, imitate them consciously or unconsciously and their breath and their mind fall in line accordingly. This very soon leads to shaking off all cares, thoughts and distressing or disturbing influences and getting ready for the inward plunge. Numerous devotees (or followers) of Maharshi have described this process from their own experience. Several say that whereas they find contemplation hard in their own homes, temples, river-sides, tanks, &c., yet if they seat themselves before him in the hall, all cares are dispelled and distracting currents cease. They say such is his grace towards them. Some of them say that they went to Maharshi, sat before him and in a few moments attained *Antarmukha drishti*, *i.e.*, the inward vision which later became habitual with them—at all times and places.

Several devotees have repeatedly declared that they do not go there to talk or ask questions, that they have had quite enough of intellectual preparation beforehand, and that they are happiest when no visitors carry on any talk and when Maharshi is seated still in *Samadhi* giving them the lead for their own *Samadhi*. This is specially the case with those who have been working on the lines recommended by him, *i.e.*, Atma Vichara (pursuing the quest "Who am I?"). Once Kapali Sastri asked him if a disciple may go to more than one Guru with advantage or without detriment to his progress. Maharshi answered that he could—provided that the current of thought of all the Gurus are substantially the same. This explains why those pursuing Maharshi's line of preparation for Samadhi find his presence so helpful—the very atmosphere of his hall being full of the quest "Who am I?"

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Several of these have been advised what to shun in the course of their concentration. They have had "photisms" *i.e.*, seen light in various shapes and forms—like the sun, the moon, lightning, golden discs, &c., with their eyes closed or open and been warned that no time ought to be wasted in them. Not having reached the intuitive feeling of the Self at that stage, their duty is to push on, deliberately brushing aside these lights ('*kalas*,' '*chit kalas*,' '*jyoti*' &c. they are termed) or sounds (*Nada*) heard within, till they reach the self by intuition. Sometimes instead of these lights, divine forms like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Siva, Subrahmanya, Mother Sakti &c., appear. Maharshi's advice has been that even when these appear, one should not stop his efforts at realisation, or think of craving for boons. These forms are subjective phenomena like other phenomena—only more glorious. All the same if they raise desires in the aspirant or divert him from the pursuit of the Self, they are hindrances; and the wise disciple would be well advised to ignore them and push on with his attempt at Self-realisation in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* where no forms are seen and no activity of the senses in any shape persists.

This advice should not be interpreted as showing any lack of reverance for these divine forms. Maharshi gives the same advice about his own form also. The last stanza in Swetasvatara Upanishad (यस्यदेवेपराभक्तिः &c.) warns the pupil that the teachings of the Upanishads will bear little fruit unless the pupil has great reverence for God and equal reverence for the Guru (who is identified with God by the pupil). So the object mostly selected by his devotees for contemplation is Maharshi himself. They either gaze at him for that purpose or at his photograph or one of his numerous pictures sold every day in many a picture shop;

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or they merely think of his image in their minds. The consequence is that his form appears to the meditating pupil, transfigured often in brilliant light; and the pupil invariably reports this to Maharshi, who then counsels the pupil to put aside all form, to remember that what is seen is perishable, what has had an origin must also have an end, and that what has to be realised is the intuitive perception of the I, the Self, and not anything seized by the senses or by the intellect. Maharshi does not ignore the value of concentration on a physical form. That is the invaluable intermediate step. That must be stressed in the case of the beginner equally as the other points of place, time, food-regimen, and sleep-regulation are. But when one has gained that rung, it is time to look ahead, throwing away the ladder by which one rose so high. The highest is not yet reached. The one thing needful is not yet gained. Self has yet to be realised..

So far mention has been made of how Maharshi helps the ordinary run of devotees who visit him. A few who are finer strung, perhaps more delicately attuned, mention their experiences with him, which cannot be adequately described by, or to, one who has not had a similar or the same experience. Some say that at a glance of Maharshi or in his presence (*vide e.g.*, the entries in the diary of Ramaswamy Iyer Ch. XVI) a current from him entered their heart, and that it has greatly assisted them in mind and body. Some say that Maharshi, in order to instruct them about the working of "the Heart" which is said to be the literal, actual, physical seat of intuition of the Self, has asked them to place their hand or palm on Maharshi's right* breast and that they felt the rhythm of this peculiar

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heartbeat, *viz.*, three sharp knocks and a very long pause; that some of them felt something like an electric shock coursing through their entire body at the very touch of his body. It is not necessary to discuss if some or all of these phenomena are due to subjective peculiarities of the particular devotees; for, whether subjective or objective, the results have the same value to them in their spiritual course. Some disciples say they derived similar benefit by their bodies being touched by Maharshi when he appeared before them in dreams or waking visions.

When Maharshi renders such aid to occasional visitors, one may easily gather that he gives no little help to the resident disciples whose chief delight and occupation is to serve at the Asram. Their very service is a great help to their progress. All the time they are cooking or watering the garden, cutting vegetables or running errands, whatever their body may be engaged in, they are intently thinking of Maharshi, as their God, their sole refuge and referring to or addressing him as "Bhagavan" (just as God would be referred to or addressed) with intense faith in him. They get occasional spells of leisure, *e. g.*, when he is asleep or just going to sleep, for some moments, or sometimes hours; then they sit by his side and try to fall into *samadhi* asking him occasionally for any guidance they require. Sometimes they spend their leisure hours in intellectual preparation and development of faith, by learning the import of his compositions like *Upadesa Sara*, *Ullathu Narpathu*, *Arunachala Stotra*, *Devikalottara*, *Dakshinamurthi Ashtaka*, etc., and by reciting them before him in sonorous Tamil along with songs of praise skilfully interwoven with his teachings.* Maharshi listens right through

* As in Ramana Sannidhimurai, by Muruganar; Ramana Stuti Panchakam, by Satyamangalam Venkatrama Iyer, etc.

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and corrects errors in the recitation if any. Early morning when he wakes up and, (after ablution) sits in his seat, meditation is often resumed, by the disciples or they may begin with "திருப்பள்ளியெழுச்சி(" *i.e.*, awakening the Lord) imitating the praises of God sung at such hours in temples and at Bhajanas, and then proceed as at night to sing his poems describing the spiritual course—specially the *Samadhi* state. These invaluable hours of meditation or communion, night and morning, are highly prized by the resident disciples; and they often continue to sit and meditate by Maharshi's seat even when he is asleep or away.

Sometimes Maharshi and disciples sit up, especially after (sometimes before) the night meal, reading books like *Ribhugita*, and *Kaivalya Navaneetha*, each by turn reading a verse or a set of verses. The books read are mostly very easy to follow; and in places, Maharshi puts in a word or two to make the meaning or its application clear. The reading continues for some two hours or more at a stretch, and occasionally a whole night is thus spent. "These readings," he says, "from *Ribhugita* are as good as *samadhi*." Evidently such a continuous reading (following the meaning intently) induces *samadhi*. In fact, page after page, nay line after line of *Ribhugita* merely goes on rubbing into one, the nature of the Self. With a constant study of such works, the mind easily gets into the "*mood of samadhi*" if one may thus refer to the intellectual preparation and the rousing of the intuition needed for *samadhi*. The words keep ringing in the ears, or in the heart for a long while after study. It is exactly for that reason he encourages constant recitation of his works by the resident disciples. His words, phrases and ideas thus soak into their minds; and they can easily catch any further hints and instructions he may give: and all thees

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permeate their subconscious mind, ripen there and produce results highly desirable, in the long run—like the flashes of "Cosmic consciousness" referred to by R. M. Bucke in his book "Cosmic Consciousness."

The description of meditation, given thus far, may produce the impression that *Nirguna Dhyana* (*i.e.*, meditation without form), is practically the only thing that obtains at the Asram. This would however be inaccurate. No doubt identification with *Nirguna* Brahman is the ultimate end and aim of all efforts at the Asram. But the veteran with thirty-nine years of experience, of thousands that approach him, knows full well, that for most people, formless contemplation (*Nirguna dhyana*) is an impossible feat; and these are advised to meditate on forms (*Saguna dhyana*) with or without the aid of images or pictures etc., according to the previous training, ideas or circumstances of each *sadhaka*. A party of vakils, vakil gumastas and others from Salem followed Vallimalai Murugar, (Tiruppugazh Swami) to see Maharshi, about December 1925. Vallimalai Murugar himself spends all his time singing Tiruppugazh (*i.e.*, praise of God Subrahmanya) composed by the poet Arunagirinatha and almost entirely devoted to meditation on form. Maharshi found him years ago repeating it very impressively with great musical talent but without understanding its meaning. Maharshi patiently sat and taught Murugar the meaning of Tiruppugazh; and now the latter (who has no other education but this) is able to expound Tiruppugazh even to Tamil graduates, and clear their doubts. It is *Saguna dhyana* that he had, and Maharshi by his exposition has enabled him to pursue it effectively. At the same time, Maharshi was requested by the Salem group, to explain how they were to derive any benefit from the *Gayatri*, which every *Brahmin* daily

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mutters many times over, whether it is to be construed literally. "Yes," Maharshi said, "there is no harm but real good in starting Gayatri dhyana taking the *Savita*, as the orb of the Sun, at first." He also approved of the use of the closing mantra "नमस्सवित्रेजगदेकचक्षुषे", etc. of the daily *Japa* to guide one in his meditation. The orb is viewed as the one eye of the Universe, the source, the sustainer and the end of all existence, the embodied form of the Vedic, *i.e.*, spiritual wisdom, the fountain of all (gunas) attributes, the soul of the Triad, *i.e.*, Brahma the Creator, Narayana the Upholder and Sankara or Siva, the Withdrawer of the Universe. The meditation is on that threefold yet unitary being as residing in the centre of the solar orb, seated on a lotus, decked with ornaments of burnished gold, bearing the resplendent crown of imperial power, (his entire body also shining like molten gold) bearing in his palms the mighty conch, (a spiral, significant of all space, wherein all the worlds are ever moving in a spiral) the terrible flaming discus, *chakra*, (wheel, significant of Time wherein all creation is held, shaped and transformed) and the weapon *Gadha*, significant of omnipotence. Thus God is to be intently thought on, as omnipotent, omnipresent or all-pervasive, infinite, eternal; and by perpetual contemplation one ought to sink his individuality in God. If the votary is earnest he need not have anxieties about the correctness of the form of his meditation. He has trusted to an omniscient power. Does not that power know what is good for the votary and will he not bestow it? Intensity of devotion converts the finite form on which the devotee begins to meditate into infinitely vast form, *i.e.*, formlessness. *Saguna* easily glides thus into *Nirguna*.

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"Every one according to his liking," is the motto at the Ramanasram, a "Liberty hall"; and various disciples place before Maharshi their special inclinations towards meditation. A *Sakta* comes up and wants advice about his line and gets it. One very keen on *mantras** with intent to achieve worldly—albeit, altruistic and highly ambitious aims—asks for advice as to the way in which he is to carry on his *japa*,† how the power presiding over the *mantra* attracts or is attracted by the *Japakarta*,‡ how the current generated in the exercise works, etc. Maharshi enters into that line of thought and gives the answers suitable to that devotee's view point; and when the latter sits up for meditation according to that point of view, Maharshi sits in Samadhi and lends him thus a helping hand.

When people require assistance not merely in the choice of a *Dhyana Murti*, *i.e.*, form to meditate upon but also in the selection of particular passages of sacred works wherein such meditation is set out, Maharshi, whose knowledge of such matters is extensive, picks out particular passages from sacred scripts to suit all. Passages abound in the Vedas and the Upanishads, describing the heart as the seat of God and God as residing therein as light (vide *Purusha Sukta*), of the size of the thumb. See Katha. Up. II. 4 (13) **अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः** (12) **मध्य आत्मनि तिष्ठति.** God is again described as floating on the waters, *i.e.*, the ocean (of milk or water), as appearing in the form of a hill or of a river flowing down from the hill **(अद्रिज).** He is described as the entire Universe **(विराट्).** Maharshi as already stated gives the disciple a free choice

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* Mystic sounds. † Incantation. ‡ The chanter.

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of forms, mantras and passages like these for his contemplation.

Several people have asked Maharshi from time to time for help (especially in directing their meditation) to overcome various cravings and thus to prepare themselves ultimately for self-realisation. In W. James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 262, the instance of Col. Gardiner is given to show how a person who was a veritable slave to sexual craving suddenly became master of himself and freed for ever from that craving, together with instances of others who similarly overcame love of drink, anger, etc. Disciples have requested Maharshi's advice for similar conquests. There are some detailed considerations set out in Sri Sankara's भजगोविन्दं or मोहमुद्गर *e.g.*, "Deem this body a nasty bundle of flesh, serum, etc., and do not be enamoured of this"; "when you are impatient and wroth with me or another, remember you are wroth with God who is in you, in me and in all." There are stinging passages in the poems of Pattanathupillai and others which similarly make one feel disgust for sexual craving and wealth. Maharshi does not generally give advice on these lines. He always goes to the root of the matter. "Aim high, aim at the highest; and all lower aims are thereby achieved," is his principle. If one tries and learns the nature of the Self, where is lust or anger there to disturb him? But some disciples are only too conscious of their own weaknesses and feel that an immediate remedy for their troubles is required, before aiming so high. When Maharshi asks them not to look downwards at the stormy seas over which he asks them to pass to the Self (Himself), they look below, despite his direction, and then stagger. "It is looking below on the stormy seas of differences that makes you sink in them. Look up, beyond these, and see

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the one glorious Real; and you are saved," is his advice. "Have faith in God, and faith in yourself: That will cure all," is his panacea for all ills. "Hope for the best, expect the best, toil for the best," he says "and everything will come right in the end." Some do rise to the occasion and by acting on this advice, meditate straightway on the Self, and overcome their "defects of doubt and taints of blood." But others struggle on with lower forms of meditation and painfully prepare themselves for साधनचतुष्टय * But they are in a small minority at the Asram; and it is not necessary to write any more about these forms of meditation, in this chapter, than to mention that many lines of Maharshi's "அகஷரமணமாலை" are found suitable by many bhaktas, while others may constantly repeat loudly or at heart other passages full of excellent suggestions, *e.g.*,

"अन्नपूर्णे सदापूर्णे शंकरप्राणवल्लभे। ज्ञानवैराग्यसिद्ध्यर्थं भिक्षांदेहि च पार्वति"

"सर्वसमत्व सर्वहितत्वं सत्संगत्वं देहिविभोमे"

which mean (1)—O Goddess Parvati, consort of Siva, bounteous feeder ever free from want (or also, perfect), give me alms, *viz.*, Wisdom (or Realisation) and non-attachment.

(2) Grant me, Oh Lord! equality towards all, universal love and association of the spiritual master.

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* *Cf.* Vivekachudamani. Four things are necessary for an aspirant to attain Moksha, *i.e.*, Salvation (1) Viveka, discrimination between the real and unreal, (2) Vairagya, non-attachment, (3) Samadi Shatka-sampatti, *i.e.*, the six qualities of restraint of the senses and mind, endurance, withdrawal, faith and concentration, and (4) Mumukshutva, yearning for liberation.

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CHAPTER XXVII

LATER DEVOTEES

गुशब्दस्त्वन्धकारस्स्यात् रुशब्दस्तन्निरोधकः ।
अन्धकारनिरोधत्वाद्गुरुरित्यभिधीयते ॥

The syllable *Gu* denotes darkness; and *Ru* denotes dispelling of the same. Consequently He who dispels the darkness (of ignorance, and imparts illumination), is styled the *Guru*.

मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततःकिं ततःकिं ततःकिं ततःकिम्

If the mind is not reverently merged into the feet of the Master (Guru) what good is there, what good indeed in possessing or achieving anything else ?

Ramana Maharshi's highly esteemed position and numerous following render him a power in social and religious matters. The question has been raised in what direction this power has been and is exercised. A living soul cannot be analysed, dissected and discussed with as much freedom and detachment as a departed hero. A few points however can be noted even about a living subject; and the reader has probably a right to get some idea of the real personality, the character and special features of the subject he is studying.

Maharshi avoids controversies,—social, religious and political. Yet one cannot be moving among hundreds of persons every day, without taking some stand on important issues. The basic principles of Maharshi's saintly life,—*Ahimsa, Samatva and Sarvahitatva, i.e.,* Harmlessness, Equality. and Universal Benevolence, naturally lead him to approve of the liberalising and humanising aspects of social reform. Members of the depressed classes have

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long been his immediate attendants and are being treated as though they belonged to the higher classes. The question was raised in 1917 whether women and Sudras were fit to be given Vedic teaching and to be inducted into the mysteries of Self-Realisation. Maharshi, without any hesitation, answered it in the affirmative and has in practice imparted instruction to women, Sudras, Harijans and non-Hindus whatever the Brahma-sutras and the commentaries thereon might say. The tendency of spiritual aspirants has generally been to shun society, not merely in the initial stage of preparation but even later. Maharshi on the other hand is fully in sympathy with the tendency of present-day ethics to stress social service rather than the perfection of the individual ascetic in isolation, and notes the importance of society even for the perfection of individual character. When Yoganatha asked him whether a man should prefer *Santi*, (*i.e.*, blissful peace in solitude) to *sakti*, (*i.e.*, the power to render service to one's community or society), Maharshi pointed out that the path to peace runs through social service, that a man should develop his full power to serve the society in which he is born before he can fall into a life wholly absorbed in the Self. He himself sets an excellent example of social service every day. People who visit the Asram and watch him stitching leafplates, cutting vegetables, reading proofs or papers and helping people in distress, learn a valuable social and spiritual lesson. S., a local teacher, was taught two such lessons years ago. On one occasion he felt vexed with himself at not rising to Maharshi's spiritual standard of excellence and absented himself for many long months from the Asram saying to himself "I shall not go up to Maharshi till I can think and act like Maharshi, *i.e.*, till I get his Vairagya (Dispassion), etc." But long absence

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from Maharshi's presence did not improve him. On the other hand, it rendered him more worldly and less spiritual. Disgusted with these results, he climbed up and found that Maharshi received him with a significant laughter. Maharshi similarly laughs and tells little half-fledged birds that try too early to fly from their nests and fall, "Why should one try his flights prematurely and fancy he can conquer the world before he is fully prepared and developed?" That was the significance of his laughter; and S. gave up his premature attempts to escape from society. On a later occasion, S. was worried with numerous vexations that befall house-holders who are not the pets of fortune, and was disgusted with social life; he was strongly tempted to leave the town and family and take to asceticism. Anyhow he felt that he must consult Maharshi beforehand and went to see him. Maharshi was engaged in stitching leaf-plates, and before S. expressed his troubles, told him the moral lessons derived from leaf stitching—"You see, with how much trouble, we stitch up and preserve a leafplate. Then it serves its purpose. *After* that purpose is served —and only after that, it is thrown away. Just so with the body. It has to be looked after till the self is realised." S. was thus taught that he should not so readily succumb under ordinary trials and vexations, and think of abandoning his post, before he renders the service for which his body came into existence.

Persons often approach Maharshi with the question whether spirituality is consistent with an active domestic or social life. He asks them "Was Rama spiritually advanced and was he leading a house-holder's life?" Raghavachar, the Supervisor, was going to Maharshi off and on; and his wife and mother feared that he might give up his social duties and become a recluse. They went and

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told Maharshi about their fears. Maharshi consequently admonished him about the dangers of becoming a recluse, without the severe training required for it. He has given similar advice to numerous others also. Maharshi's own example induces many to quit family life. Every year a dozen or more persons run away from their homes and go to Ramanasram in the hope that they could become Ramanas themselves. These are mostly moved by a passing wind of disgust with social life (Vairagya), and their ardour is soon cooled by the warning and dissuasion at the Asram ; and they go back sadder and wise. A few however are more resolute and withstand all dissuasion and prove eminent exemplars for those who wish to begin a strenuous spiritual career with rigorous (*tapas*) austerities in solitude or holy company. A few of these cases, amongst those that recently attached themselves (*i.e.*, during the last ten years or more) to Maharshi may be appropriately described in this chapter, as their lives illustrate one side of Maharshi's influence.

In 1917 Natananandar (then known as Natesa Mudaliar), an elementary school teacher, read with great interest the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in respect of Jnana, (*i.e.*, path of inquiry), wished to give up his married life, and become a recluse, and proceeded to find a suitable Guru to obtain Self-Realisation. He began to inquire of many if there was any living Guru who could instruct and inspire his disciples as Sri Ramakrishna inspired and instructed Vivekananda. "Yes, there is one": several said "and that is Sri Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai." "But," some added "getting *upadesa* from him is a well-nigh hopeless task." Nothing daunted N. went up soon after (*i.e.*, in 1918) to Maharshi at the Skandasram and sat in silence before him. He dared not

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ask any question; and the Swami did not deign to open conversation. So he felt that his friends were right in their judgment about the impossibility of getting *upadesa* or instruction from this Swami, and returned dejected. His determination to obtain his special grace however was by no means abandoned. Difficulties or the rarity of the object aimed at only strengthened his resolve to obtain his end. "A Sat-Guru must be found. Are there any others?" thought he, and went to see some reputed ascetics. But they did not impress him well enough; and he could not surrender himself as a disciple at their feet. So back again his mind flew to Maharshi; and the only question was, how his grace could be obtained. So in 1920, he wrote a letter at great length placing before the Maharshi the example of Tayumanavar who wrote "காகமுறவு கலந்துண்ணக் கண்டீர்" (*i.e.*, see, crows are selfless and share their grub with their kind).....and of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; requested him not to be selfishly indifferent to the fate of longing souls; and added that his previous visit was fruitless, and that if Maharshi should deign to give written permission, he (N) would at once go to his feet etc." A month passed without the receipt of a reply. So he next sent a registered letter (with acknowledgment paid) to Maharshi. Therein he stated "Whatever the number of re-births I have to endure still, I am resolved to get my *Upadesa*, *i.e.*, instruction from you, and you alone. So you (Maharshi) on this account must be reborn, if you give me up in this birth as unprepared or too immature to receive your instruction. I swear to this." A few days after this, Maharshi appeared in a dream, and said to him, "Do not constantly think of me: you have first to secure the favour of God Maheswara, the Lord of the Bull. First meditate upon Him and secure His grace. My help will

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follow as a matter of course." Thenceforward he meditated upon Maheswara as riding on a bull, of whom he had pictures at home. A few days later, a letter was received from Vasudeva Sastri " Your two letters received. Maharshi does not reply to letters. You can come and see him in person." After ascertaining by a fresh letter, who Sastri was, and if the reply was written at Maharshi's bidding, N went up to Tiruvannamalai. Following the direction in the dream, he spent that night at the temple, after getting *darsan* of Arunachaleswara (*i.e.*) Maheswara. The same night, a local Brahmin learning his purpose tried to dissuade him. " Well, sir, I have spent sixteen years in vain with Ramana Maharshi trying to get his 'Anugraham' (*i.e.*) grace. He is so indifferent to everything. Even if you should break your head there, he will not care or inquire why. So his 'Anugraham' being impossible of attainment your visit to him will bear no fruit." But N did not yield assent to this view. Then the Brahmin said "Anyhow if you are going to be so lucky as to get his *upadesam*, you can test it this way. There is a saint here of the name 'Seshadri' who mixes with none and lets none approach him. He mostly beats off people from approaching him ; if you can get some favour from him, then that will be good augury of the success in store for you." So next morning N and J. V. Subrahmanya Iyer (a fellow-teacher at Anantapuram) set out in quest of this " wild-bird-like" Seshadri Swami. The quest was in vain for a long while but at last Seshadri came and instructed N. thus :

"ஐயையோ குழந்தாய் ! என் மனதைப் புண்படுத்திக் கவலைப்படவேண்டும் ? ஞானம் ஞானம் என்றால் என்ன? எது எது அநித்தியமோ, அதை யெல்லாம் புத்தியால் நீக்கி, எது நீக்கமுடியாமல் மிஞ்சுகிறதோ அதுதான் ஞானம். அது

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தான் தெய்வம்; எல்லாம் அதுதான். மலையிலே போனால்தான் ஞானம்வரும், குகையில் போனால்தான் ஞானம்வரும் என்று அங்குமிங்கும் அலைவது பைத்தியம்தான், பயப்படாதே. போ"

"Alas, child! Why are you heart-sore and anxious? What is *Jnana* (Wisdom)? After the mind rejects objects one after another, as transient and unreal, that which survives this elimination, is *Jnana* (Wisdom or Realisation). That is God. Everything is that and that alone. It is madness to run hither and thither in the belief that *Jnana* can be attained only by going to a hill or to a cave. Go without fear." This was clearly happy augury. Full of joy, N went up-hill to Maharshi that very noon, and bowed and sat before him. For five or six hours, no words passed between him and the Swami. Just as Swami was about to leave the place for his meal, J. V. Iyer told him, pointing to N. "This is the person that wrote the letters." Maharshi carefully looked at him twice, and went away. N visited the Asram off and on, every month without opening his lips to question Maharshi,—for this is what he felt about Maharshi:—

"Others abide our question—Thou art free;
We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still;
Out-topping knowledge."

"Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured and self-secure
Dost walk on earth unguessed at."

A year later, N opened his mouth, and asked Maharshi "I wish to learn and experience what your *Anugraham* or grace is, as people differ in their accounts of it." Maharshi replied "I am always giving my *Anugraham*. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do?" N discovered thereby, that his silent *Samadhi* (*i.e.*) (ecstatic state) was

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itself "Anugraham" (*i.e.*) his grace, which all aspirants should imitate, contact with and get into. Still the "*mounam*" state was not clear to him; and he was troubled over it. Some friends advised him to concentrate on some object or deity. He did not however agree to that course, as he had read Tayumanavar who sang *
that குணம் (attributes) and குறி (symbol or object) (*i.e* characteristics) should be transcended in meditation. Some days later Maharshi appeared to him in a dream and said:—

"இரு கண்களின் பார்வையையும் ஏகப்படுத்தி புறத்தி லும் லக்ஷியம் வைக்காமல் திருஷ்டியை சமப்படுத்திக்கொண்டு அப்பியசி."

"Let your vision be unified and withdrawn from objects external or internal. Differences thus disappearing, get on." N took the advice to mean that he should see with the physical eye as directed, and replied, "This does not seem to me a proper course. If such a superior person like you should give me this advice, who will give me true advice?" Then Maharshi swore that it was the true course, which he had indicated, and added "Your doubt is not however wrong. Try this for a short while; by this means you will attain Self-state."

N thus describes his next step.

"I followed this dream-*Upadesa* (*i.e.*, instruction) for a while. Then I had another dream, in which Maharshi appeared to me while my father was by. Maharshi asked me, pointing to my father, 'Who is this?' I with some

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* கற்றதும் கேட்டதுந்தானே யேதுக் காகக்
கடபடமென் றுருட்டுதற்கோ கல்லாலெம்மான்
குற்றமறக் கைகாட்டுங் கருத்தைக் கண்டு
குணங்குறியற் றின்பநிட்டை கூட வன்றோ.

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hesitation about the philosophical accuracy of the answer, said, 'This is my father.' Maharshi smiled at me significantly; and I added 'My answer is in accordance with common parlance, and not with philosophy' because I was not the body. Maharshi drew me near to him, and placed his palm first on my head and next on my right breast, pressing his finger over the nipple. It caused some pain, but as it was his *Anugraham* or grace, I endured it quietly. I did not know then why he pressed the right breast and not the left. I awoke at once." N gathered from the above that the question about the father was with a view to make him give up completely his *Dehatmabuddhi* (*i.e.*, his identification of himself with the body), and that the touch on the head and breast was *Hastha Diksha* (*i.e.*, the transmission of grace or *Anugraham* to the disciple by touch of the Guru's palm), over the disciple's "heart."

Sometime later, N came to Maharshi. Some highly gifted persons were comparing notes with the Swami, of their advanced experiences in matters spiritual, *i.e.*, in the highest reaches of the soul's flight. Sitting very near and drinking in every word through his ears, N was aghast. The words he heard were easy, well known Tamil or Sanskrit words. But the sense hit off by them was far above his level! The talk was all above, far, far above him. A great sorrow overwhelmed his soul. "When shall I, or shall I ever, get to have these experiences? In any future birth of mine?" Thus he thought within himself. His dejection must have caught the master's keen eyes; and after the visitors left, Maharshi said to him "Why are you anxious? What you seek is that which is there ready (Siddha) at hand always. Can any one feel anxiety whether he will get what is and exists always? Do

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you feel just now that you have not got a mastery of it, *i.e.*, that it is not in the palm of your hand? If it is not clear to-day, it will be clear to you to-morrow. Why should you be downcast over such a matter? If you were really unfit to learn it, how could the thought of seeing great ones have occurred to you?" Peace entered his soul immediately.

Maharshi's grace has been showered on N and his family by means of dreams. All members of that family would go to Tiruvannamalai and wait on Maharshi with faith. Maharshi knew the depth of N's emotion on each occasion. But sometimes he would test the strength of his resolve, before granting him his wishes.

Thus about 1926 N approached the Swami and said that he desired to become a hermit, as that seemed the only course since domestic life was standing ever in the way of achieving peace and control of mind. Maharshi tried to dissuade him, and pointed out, that if one quitted home to escape a single hindrance and go to the forest, ten hindrances would beset him there, as though they came up on purpose to test his mettle. "But do not ask me, why I came" said the Swami. "Somehow I came then." And he quoted "மஹாராஜா துறவு" (A king's non-attachment), and said the *Maharaja* when he left home and all, no doubt said "தென்திசை நடப்போர் கங்கை சென்றுதோய்ந் திடுவ ரோதான்,...இல்லில் நிற்பவர் முத்திசேரார். *i.e.*, "If a man goes southwards, he will never go to the Ganges. Similarly, one that stays at home will never obtain salvation. But the same *Maharaja* at a later stage said that there was no difference between domestic life and a hermit's life." "Just as you avoid cares of home when you are here," said the Swami "go home, and try to be equally unconcerned and unaffected, in the midst of home life." N

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got the same reply in the negative, on two or three later occasions, when he again broached the subject of *Sanyasa*. Maharshi's words have proved to be quite prophetic. N with an impetuosity which no doubt does credit to his heart put on Kashayam and became a sanyasi. But he was prevailed upon after a few years, to resume his place as a householder and work for his family, as a teacher in a School. The favour of Maharshi was shown to him by ready and illuminating answers to his numerous questions. These were just hinted at in N's poems sung in praise of the Maharshi (*viz.*) "ரமணதோத்திரமஞ்ஜரி, "ரமணதோத்திர சோடசம்," "ரமணநான்மணிமாலை." "ரமண அந்தாதி," "ரமண சதகம்." etc., and set out more clearly in his recent catechism, "உபதேச மஞ்ஜரி" which embodies not merely replies given to him, but also to others, replies that were however not always elicited in the manner, or in the order, set out therein.

Among the favours shown by Maharshi to N's family (all of whom have sincere faith in him) one fact may be singled out and narrated here. His eldest brother went to Maharshi some five years back, and sat in his presence thinking within himself thus, "They say that this Maharshi has *Iswaramsa* (*i.e.*,) Divine qualities in him. If so, he ought to divine my thought, and teach me *Atma Swarupam* (the nature of God), without my questioning him." He did not put any question. Maharshi, who never gives a man any instruction unless questioned, began addressing him on the nature of the *Atman*. This was an instance of Maharshi's thought-reading and his kindness towards earnest aspirants.

Before closing this chapter, we may briefly notice some typical recluses, or devotees who have left their homes and relatives and sought the feet of Ramana

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Maharshi for further guidance, *viz.*, Ramanathier, a teacher, and a disciple who despite his development of *vairagya*, is still retaining some social contact and attending to some social duties, under Maharshi's guidance, *viz.*, Yogi Ramiah.

Ramanathier was an elementary school teacher in a village in the Tanjore district. He developed faith in Ramana Maharshi and visited the Ramanasram, at first on holidays. He seems to have read up the works of Maharshi and the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. As his faith became more fervent he began to grow reckless of his social obligations. He was past forty; and he had a wife and young children to maintain out of his earnings as a teacher. Yet when his faith grew, his sense of social duty suddenly gave way, and he frequently left his post and went away on pilgrimages to Ramanasram and elsewhere. The first default was condoned by his superiors and he was restored to his post. But again he left his school and home, and went away to Ramanasram. There he sat in a dazed state before Maharshi, not speaking to any one—not even to Maharshi. He went on with his meditations in the Asram hall in a perfectly nude condition —evidently following Sri Ramakrishna's example and precept that one must free himself from his sheaths—including dress, caste, etc. The Swami's disciples took exception to this practice and retied the cod-piece on to him. Again at dead of night, he moved out into the adjoining tank (Palitirtham) for his meditation. The disciples afraid that he might get drowned, pulled him out and brought him to the hall. Again he went out into the darkness of the night and sat up naked in the open ground beyond the Asram for his meditation. He was again re-clothed and brought back to the hall lest cheetas that occasionally visit

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the Asram should attack him ; and he was finally locked up in a cottage. Finding it impossible to look after him, one of the disciples took him to his village. But in a short time he returned to Tiruvannamalai and continued his nude and silent meditation at Pandavatirtham at the foot of the Hill at some distance from the Asram. His wife and child went to Ramanasram and invited him home. Maharshi also advised him to attend to his social duties. But this disciple had finally resolved to cut himself away from domestic duties and discarding all solicitation and advice is now wandering as a *mouni*, keenly intent on developing his *Vairagya* and *Jnana*, *i.e.*, dispassion and illumination, living upon the alms that he gets.

Yogi Ramiah belongs to the community of Reddiars and is a rich landed proprietor of Annareddipoliem, near Buchireddipoliem, Nellore District. He received hardly any education. Being the sole owner of his properties he had every inducement to pass his days merrily with his thoughtless companions, boys of his own age. But just at about the age of eighteen his thoughts took a serious turn on reading the life of Kabir and he gave up his former associates and took interest in religion. A Brahmin Guru imparted to him the Rama Taraka *mantram* and asked him to repeat it five thousand times daily. " If the number is exceeded, what then ?" asked the ardent youth. " So much the better" was the Guru's reply. " If I repeat it always ?" was the next query. The Guru was delighted at the keenness of the disciple's enthusiasm and expressed warm approval. Ramiah went on with his *japam* from morning till night whatever he might be doing. He also began to practise breath control. Meantime *vairagya* or disgust with his worldly surroundings, waxed so strong in his breast that he suddenly left home to go north to perform

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tapas in some holy places like Kasi. On the way he met his former Guru who asked him if he had obtained his mother's permission for the pilgrimage. When he admitted that there was no intimation or permission, the Guru sent him back to his village. "Go and do your *tapas* in the seclusion of your garden and I shall go down later on and see how you progress," said the Guru. Ramiah returned and went on with his *tapas*. He developed both his breath regulation and meditation without any one to help him. He was able to remain several hours in a blissful mood beholding the tip of his nose, the breath being easily regulated and stilled. His mind was equally stilled and happy. Perfect continence, satvic food just barely enough to keep the body and mind working, and intense devotion through his japa to God (Sri Rama) carried him soon to illumination in *Samadhi*. In his concentration of the mind assisted by the fixed gaze on the tip of the nose at first and on the space between the eyebrows later, he experienced the vision of the Sun, the Moon and Sri Rama. These appeared and disappeared, and he felt that he was the seer and knower of these forms. As he continued his concentration, all these disappeared and there was only the feeling of a bright something—like a curtain, beyond which there was nothing to experience. That subsisted right through (not coming and disappearing like the previously mentioned forms); and That alone subsisted, for there was no separate knower or seer seeing or knowing it. Could the subject and object be after all identical? He asked local pandits about it. Their replies did not satisfy him. So he came to Tiruvannamalai and in Maharshi's presence asked Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri about it "The subject is of course different from the object" was the pandit's reply. Ramiah was disappointed and looked up to Maharshi, who at once supple-

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mented or corrected the pandit's reply. " Subject and object are distinct in the phenomenal world to the ordinary man. But in *samadhi* they merge and become one." Ramiah was very glad to get a corroboration of his experience from this eminent Swami. Thenceforward he took Maharshi as his sole guide. He is still going on with Yoga, *Mounam*, and *tapas*, to perfect his *Vasanakshaya* (*i.e.*, extinction of desires). He eats little, controls his breath and stays many hours at a stretch in blissful ecstasy—mostly in the cottage in his own garden, and also for a few months each year with Maharshi at Ramanasram. He loves and is loved by Maharshi. As Yogi Ramiah does not know Tamil, Maharshi translated his recent Tamil poems Upadesa Sara and Ullathu Narpathu into Telugu. Yogi Ramiah has appreciably helped in repairing Palitirtham, in the construction of the Asram hall and the draw-well.

Another type attracted to Maharshi is furnished by Suddhananda Bharati. He was for long a prominent patriot working in the fields of Tamil literature, journalism Gurukul education, social reconstruction, and politics along with his fellow-worker, the late V. V. S. Iyer. In the midst of these multifarious activities, he did not neglect religion. In fact for all his selfless work he wanted power and it is as Sakti that God appealed to him and the means adopted by him then were chiefly the time-honored Pranayama and Tapas, which gave him brief spells of Nada, Kala and Laya (*i.e.*, internal sounds, photisms, and the losing of oneself). His religion was however eclectic and catholic. With a voracious appetite, he roamed over many places in quest of religious satisfaction, moved ultimately with Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians and Sikhs and studied their sacred writings and religious forms. It was while he was studying Jains and Jainism at Sravana Bela-

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gola (in the Mysore State) that the inner call of Ramana became intense. He had heard of Maharshi long before that and felt attracted to him. But that was a bare spark, which took time to glow and blaze up as it did when he was at Sravana Belagola. From that place he went up to Tiruvannamalai and saw Maharshi, who first appeared to him as a heap of sacred ashes, then as a Pillar of Fire and next as Siva Linga, (thus). In that interview, Maharshi was the first to speak. While Bharati bowed to K. K. G. Sastri, a few yards off, Maharshi said: "Bharati! Is it the author of Bharata Sakti ?", showing how keenly he had appreciated Bharati's works. Bharati felt happy at this recognition and condescension. Maharshi next invited him to breakfast,—an invitation which was gladly accepted with the rider that it was for spiritual food from Maharshi that the visitor had come to the Asram. Bharati asked no questions and wanted no intellectual food. He simply feasted his eyes by constantly gazing on Maharshi and rapidly composed many lines of Tamil verse about Maharshi in the space of an hour at the very first visit.

Contact with Maharshi made him feel more introverted; and his egotism sank so low that he began to refer to himself in the third person. In this way he spent six months (in 1929) at Tiruvannamalai and later went to Sri Arabindo Asram, Pondicherry, where he is evidently resuming his quest of "Sakti." There Sakti has inspired him to ethereal flights of imagination and devotion and he put forward a brilliant piece of poetic prose in Tamil, *Ramana Vijayam* (*i.e.*, life of Sri Ramana), every line of which breathes fervid devotion to Maharshi.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

A WESTERN DEVOTEE

After the first edition of Maharshi's life was published in English, people not only from other provinces of India but also from the West have been approaching him—either in person or by means of letters and trying to benefit themselves spiritually. It will be invidious to make a selection from these ; despite that fact and despite the repetition of instructions involved, it seems advisable to narrate the experiences of at least one of these Western devotees or admirers before closing the volume.

Recently (in 1934) there appeared a very rapidly sold and widely read book *A Search in Secret India** by Paul Brunton, which is really a very interesting book of thrilling spiritual adventures, ending in the discovery (by P. B.) of Maharshi and through Maharshi, of himself. This and the following chapter are hardly anything more than an adaptation or extract of relevant portions of that book.

Paul Brunton is a successful English journalist who interested himself in Theosophy, Spiritualism, Hypnotism, Thought Reading, etc., and obtained some first-hand experiences in some of these fields. The serious side of his mind gradually developed to such an extent that he rejected a profitable journalistic proposal and started out to India in 1930 in quest of the unknown truth behind all life,—as India was by all accounts the land

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where great mysteries and miracles were more common and more easily to be witnessed and experienced than in the West, and where sages were still to be found who could teach pupils, if duly qualified, not only the mysteries of Thaumaturgy--but the greatest of all mysteries, the mystery of existence and the meaning of life.

Here he went through various interesting experiences. After meeting the Egyptian sorcerer, Mahmoud Bey (at Bombay), the Parsi Messiah, Meher Baba (at Nasik), and M.B.'s guru—Baba Jan (at Poona), and a Hatha Yogi, Brahma Sukhananda Rajagopalaswami (at Saidapet), he proceeded to Chingleput where the Kanchipitam Sri Sankaracharya was camping and requested His Holiness to give him enlightenment; but the latter directed him to go to Ramana Maharshi and privately informed his (P.B.'s) companion, Venkatramani, that though he (P.B.) would leave Maharshi and tour all India, in quest of all sorts of things, he would finally return to Maharshi—as Maharshi was the Guru marked out for him by destiny.

P. Brunton went over to Tiruvannamalai and after due prostration sat in front of Maharshi—whom he found seated gazing in his usual, calm and serene manner, surrounded by devotees.*

At first P. B. wondered for a moment whether Maharshi's peace and serenity were a mere superficial pose for the benefit of his devotees; but soon shaking off that idea, he became aware of a silent, resistless change taking place within his own mind.

A steady river of quietness seemed to be flowing near him, a great peace was penetrating the inner reaches of his being, and his thought-tortured brain was beginning to

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* *Cf.* supra, *i.e.*, उदासीनवदासीन = in perfect indifference.

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arrive at some rest. Suddenly and clearly he realised that the intellect created its own problems and then made itself miserable trying to solve them. Naturally this sudden peace and perception must be due to Maharshi's influence. Said he to himself,

"Does this man, Maharshi, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals?" The peace and perception he enjoyed did not last long. They were evidently a mere foretaste and were soon withdrawn. His old intellectuality was re-asserting itself. Later he asked Maharshi:

"Is there anything beyond man's material existence? If so, how can I realise it for myself?" That is, he wanted more light upon the hidden truth behind life, and Maharshi's assistance to experience enlightenment.

After a pause Maharshi replied:

You say 'I. 'I want to know.' Tell me, who is that 'I'?

P. B.:—I am afraid I do not understand your question.

M:—Is it not clear? Think again!

Then P. B. pointed a finger towards his body (Rupa) and mentioned his name (Nama).

M.:—And do you know him?

P. B. (smiling): All my life.

M.:—But that is only your body. Again I ask 'Who are you?' There is only one thing to be done. Look into your own self. Do this in the right way and you shall find the answer to all your problems.

P. B.:—What must one do? What method can I pursue?

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M. :—Through deep reflection on the nature of one's self, and through constant meditation, the light can be found.

P. B. :—I have frequently given myself up to meditation upon the truth, but I see no signs of progress.

M. :—How do you know that no progress has been made? It is not easy to perceive one's progress in the spiritual realm.

P. B. :—Is the help of a master necessary?

M. :—It might be.

P. B. :—Can a master help a man to look into his own self in the way you suggest?

M. :—He can give the man all that he needs for this quest. Such a thing can be perceived through personal experience.

P. B. :—How long will it take to get some enlightenment with a master's help?

M. :—It all depends on the maturity of the seeker's mind. The gunpowder catches fire in an instant, while much time is needed to set fire to the coal.

P. B.'s mind did not at once catch Maharshi's fire, but allowed his old problem to crop up and he asked questions having no apparent bearing on Self-Realisation. Would Maharshi express an opinion about the future of the world, as we are living in critical times?

M. :—Why should you trouble yourself about the future? You do not even properly know about the present! Take care of the present; the future will then take care of itself.

P. B. still anxious to have a prophecy on the world's future returned to the attack but got a cold douche.

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P. B. :—Will the world soon enter a new era of friendliness and mutual help, or will it go down into chaos and war?

M. :—There is one who governs the world, and it is His lock-out to look after the world. He who has given life to the world, knows how to look after it also. He bears the burden of this world, not you.

P. B. :—Yet if one looks around with unprejudiced eyes, it is difficult to see where this benevolent regard comes in.

M. :—As you are, so is the world. Without understanding yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world? This is a *question that seekers after truth need not consider. People waste their energies* over all such questions. First, find out the truth behind yourself; then you will be in a better position to understand the truth behind the world, of which yourself is a part.

Later P. B. while yet before Maharshi falls into a half sleep, lulled by the intangible peace which, in the sage's proximity, begins to penetrate him more deeply. Ultimately there comes a gap in his consciousness and then a vivid dream. He finds himself a little boy, who is taken up the Arunachala Hill by Maharshi. Then in the dream Maharshi turns and looks down into his face; and he, in turn, gazes expectantly up at Maharshi and becomes aware of a mysterious change taking place with great rapidity in his heart and mind. The old motives which had lured him on begin to desert him.

Suddenly Maharshi bids him turn his gaze down to the bottom of the hill. He obeys and is astonished to see that the Western hemisphere of the globe lay stretched out far below. It was crowded with millions of people; he could vaguely discern them as masses of forms, but the

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night's darkness still enshrouded them. Then says Maharshi :—

"When you go back there, you shall have this peace which you now feel. But its price will be that you shall henceforth cast aside the idea that you are this body or this brain. When this peace will flow into you, then you shall have to forget your own self, for you will have turned your life over to THAT !"

And Maharshi places one end of a thread of silver light in his hand.

He awoke from that extraordinarily vivid dream with the sense of its penetrating sublimity yet upon him.

Later P. B. gets to his usual cold calculation and takes stock of the situation. He finds that the sage has *no wish to convert* any one to his own ideas, whatever they may be, and no desire to add a single person to his following, and his *amour propre* is a bit wounded by the fact. Yet ever since he had his dream he feels a great awe whenever he enters Maharshi's presence. These and some other ideas form conflicting currents within him—not yet harmonised to give him the unified and peaceful frame of mind which he was admiring in the sage and longed for in himself.

He still possesses a cynical, sceptical outlook unstirred by religious emotion, and wonders how Maharshi freed himself from all problems, so that no woe could touch him. As P. B. is still at war with himself, questions issue out—especially about the need for, or the evils of, an ascetic life.

P. B.:—The Yogis say that one must renounce this world and go off into secluded jungles or mountains, if one wishes to find truth. Such things can hardly be done in the West; our lives are so different. Do you agree with the Yogis ?

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Lady Devotees & Maharshi

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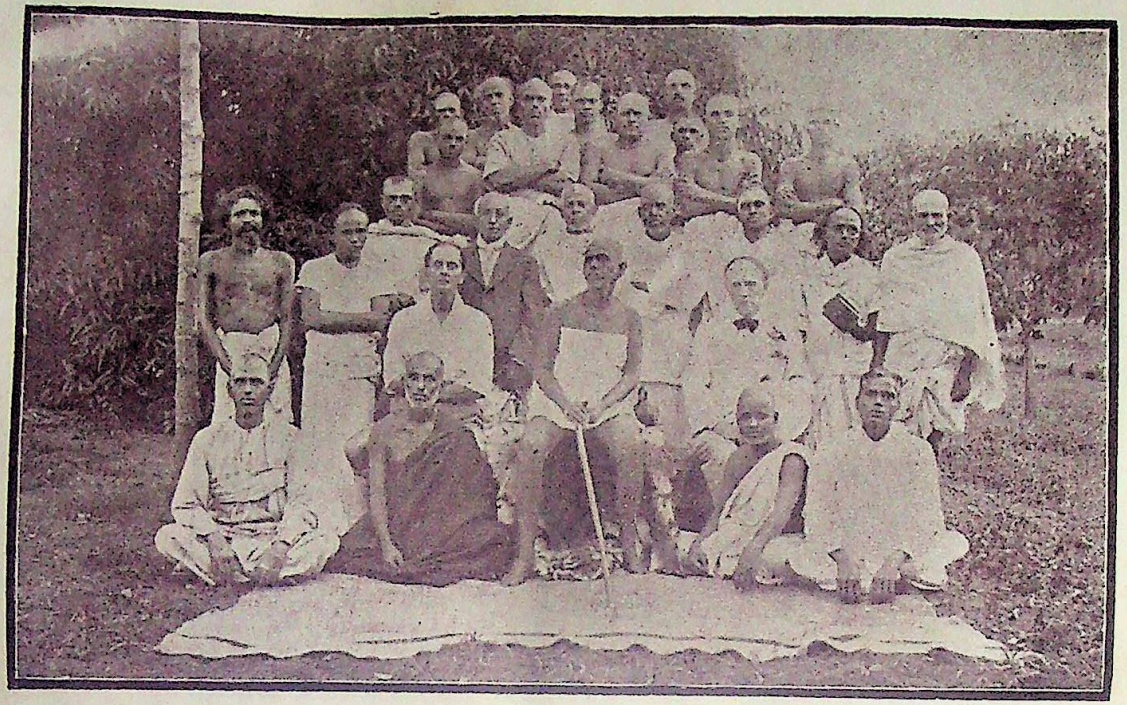

(1934) Maharshi with Yogi Ramia, Niranjananandaswamy &c.

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M. :—The life of action need not be renounced. If you meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea ; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities.

P. B. :—What will be the result of doing that ?

M. :—As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord....

A man should surrender the personal selfishness which binds him to this world. Giving up the false self is the true renunciation.

P. B. :—How is it possible to become selfless while leading a life of worldly activity ?

M. :—There is no conflict between work and wisdom.

P. B. :—Do you mean that one can continue all the old activities in one's profession, for instance, and at the same time get enlightenment ?

M. :—Why not ? But in that case one will not think that it is the old personality which is doing the work because one's consciousness will gradually become transformed until it is entered in That which is beyond the little self.

P. B. :—If a person is engaged in work, there will be little time left for him to meditate.

M. :—Setting apart time for meditation is only for the merest spiritual novices. A man who is advancing will begin to enjoy the deeper beatitude, whether he is at work

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or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude.

P. B. :—(Using the word Yoga to denote only ascetic practice). Then you do not teach the way of Yoga?

M. :—The Yogi tries to drive his mind to the goal, as a cowherd drives a bull with a stick, but on this path the seeker coaxes the bull by holding out a handful of grass!

P. B. :—How is that done?

M. :—You have to ask yourself the question, 'Who am I'? This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem and you will solve all other problems thereby.

Will it be clearer if it is put in this way? All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one. But have you ever been struck by the fact that they love their own selves most? Now relate that to the fact that they are ever desirous of attaining happiness through one means or another, through drink or through religion, and you are provided with a clue to the real nature of man. Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end.

P. B. :—But the world is so unhappy?

M. :—Yes, but that is because the world is ignorant of its true self. All men, without exception, are consciously or unconsciously seeking for it. Even if they sin it is because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin which they commit. This striving is instinctive in

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man, but they do not know that they are really seeking their true selves, and so they try these wicked ways first as a means to attain a liberty.

P. .:—What exactly is this self of which you speak? If what you say is true, then there must be another self in man.

M.:—Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves? To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyse himself. Because it has long been his habit to think as others think, he has never faced his 'I' in the true manner. He has not a correct picture of himself; he has too long identified himself with the body and the brain. Therefore, I tell you to pursue this enquiry, 'Who am I'?

You ask me to describe this true self to you. What can be said? It is That, out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises, and into which it shall have to disappear.

P. B.:—Disappear? How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?

M.:—The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primæval thought in the mind of every man, is the thought 'I.' It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun 'I' has arisen in the mind, that the second personal pronoun 'You' can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I' thread until it leads you back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so is it the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced.

P. B.:—You mean that it is perfectly possible to conduct such a mental investigation into oneself?

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M.:—Assuredly! It is possible to go inwards until the last thought 'I' gradually vanishes.

P. B.:—What is then left? Will a man then become quite unconscious, or will he become an idiot?

M.:—Not so: On the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is immortal, and he will become truly wise, when he has awakened to his true self, which is the real nature of man.

P. B.:—But surely the sense of 'I' must also pertain to that?

M.:—The sense of 'I' pertains to the person, the body and brain. When a man knows his true self for the first time, something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it ths soul, still others name it Nirvana, and Hindus call it Liberation; you may give it what name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself; rather, he has found himself.

Unless and until a man embarks upon this quest of the true self, doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps throughout life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others, when in their heart of hearts they know that they cannot rule themselves. Yet the greatest power is at the command of the man who has penetrated to his inmost depth. There are men of giant intellects who spend their lives gathering knowledge about many things. Ask these men if they have solved the mystery of man, if they have conquered themselves, and they will hang their heads in shame. What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are? Men avoid this enquiry into the true self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken?

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P. B.:—That is so difficult, a superhuman task.

M.:—The difficulty is less real than you think.

The realization of truth is the same for both Indians and Europeans. Admittedly the way to it may be harder for those who are engrossed in worldly life, but even then one can and must conquer. The current induced during meditation can be kept up by habit, by practising to do so. Then one can perform his work and activities in that very current itself; there will be no break. Thus, too, there will be no difference between meditation and external activities. If you meditate on this question, Who am I?—if you begin to perceive that neither the body nor the brain nor the desires are really you, then the *very attitude of enquiry* will eventually draw the answer to you out of the depths of your own being; it will come to you of its own accord as a deep realization.

Know the real self, and then the truth will shine forth within your heart like sunshine. The mind will become untroubled and real happiness will flood it, for happiness and the true self are identical. You will have no more doubts once you attain this self-awareness.

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CHAPTER XXIX

A WESTERN DEVOTEE—*Contd.*

Paul Brunton went away from Tiruvannamalai and enquired into the numerous supernatural and extraordinary things with which India abounds and which naturally interest a Westerner, *e. g.*, Astrology, witchcraft, reviving the dead, creating objects out of empty space. He went also to see the Radha Swami Cult-centre at Dayalbagh, and to Nasik, the headquarters of the Parsi Messiah who had promised to endow him with siddhis, thaumaturgic powers. Not satisfied with all these he came back to Truvannamalai to take up the position of a disciple of Maharshi and put his request briefly and bluntly. The reply was :—

M. :—What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple's standpoint. To the one who has realized the true self, there is neither master nor disciple. Such a one regards all people with equal eye. You must find the master within you, within your own spiritual self. You must regard his body in the same way that he himself regards it; the body is not his true self.

This looked like a rebuff. Yet P. B. made the Ashram his abode for a time and waited. Then whatever he was doing, he never failed to become gradually aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiations which steadily percolated into his brain. He enjoyed an ineffable tranquillity merely by sitting for a while in the neighbourhood of Maharshi. By careful observation and frequent analysis he arrived in time at the complete certi-

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tude that a reciprocal inter-influence arose whenever he was near Maharshi. The thing was most subtle. But it was quite unmistakable.

Again he realised that all his questions moved in an endless game, the play of thoughts which possess no limit to their extent; that somewhere within him there was a well of certitude which could provide him with all the waters of truth he required and that it would be better to cease his questioning and attempt to realize the tremendous potencies of his own spiritual nature. So he remained silent and waited, being perfectly aware of the sublime realisation being due to nothing else than a spreading ripple of telepathic radiation from this mysterious and imperturbable man. Yet though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak; the former nature could not be killed out at one stroke.

P. B.:—This path is full of difficulties and I am so conscious of my own weaknesses.

M.:—This is the surest way to handicap oneself, this burdening of one's mind with the fear of failure and thought of one's failings. That fear is not true. The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself.

P. B.:—It is easy for you to attain and keep spiritual serenity in this jungle retreat, where there is nothing to disturb or distract you, but not for us in our busy town.

M.:—When the goal is reached, when you know the Knower, there is no difference between living in a house in London and living in the solitude of a jungle.

P. B. found that Maharshi's way of helping others was by an unobstrusive, silent and steady outpouring of

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healing vibrations into troubled souls, a mysterious telepathic process for which science will one day be required to account. As to how P. B. himself was helped, it is best to allow him to tell in his own exquisite style:—

"During those daily meditations in the potent neighbourhood of the sage, I have learnt how to carry my thoughts inward to an ever-deepening point. It is impossible to be in frequent contact with him without becoming lit up inwardly, as it were, mentally illumined by a sparkling ray from his spiritual orb. Again and again I become conscious that he is drawing my mind into his atmosphere during these periods of quiet repose. And it is at such times that one begins to understand why the silences of this man are more significant than his utterances. His quiet unhurried poise veils a dynamic attainment, which can powerfully affect a person without the medium of audible speech or visible action. There are moments when I feel this power of his so greatly that I know he has only to issue the most disturbing command and I will readily obey it. But the Maharshi is the last person in the world to place his followers in the chains of servile obedience, and allows every one the utmost freedom of action. In this respect he is quite refreshingly different from most of the teachers and Yogis I have met in India.

My meditations take the line he had indicated during my first visit, when he had tantalized me by the vagueness which seemed to surround many of his answers. I have begun to look into my own self.

The gist of his message is:—

"Pursue the enquiry 'Who am I?' relentlessly. Analyse your entire personality. Try to find out where the I-thought begins. Go on with your meditations.

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Keep turning your attention, within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop, and it will eventually lead you to the goal."

In the helpful proximity of the Maharshi, my meditations and self-soliloquies become increasingly less tiring and more effective. A strong expectancy and sense of being guided inspire my constantly repeated efforts. There are strange hours when I am clearly conscious of the unseen power of the sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality, with the result that I penetrate a little deeper still into the shrouded borderland of being, which surrounds the human mind.

But if, humanly speaking, he is well insulated against outside contacts, whoever discovers the requisite Ariadne's thread can walk the inner path leading to spiritual contact with him.

And I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, and an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him; because he makes no claims to occult powers and heirophantic knowledge to impress the mystery-loving nature of his countrymen; and because he is so totally without any traces of pretension that he strongly resists every effort to canonize him during his life-time.

It seems to me further, that one must accept the fact that such a sage comes to reveal something to us, not to argue anything with us. At any rate, his teachings make a strong appeal to me; for his personal attitude and practical method, when understood, are quite scientific in their way. He brings in no supernatural power and demands no blind religious faith.

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The sublime spirituality of Maharshi's atmosphere and the rational self-questioning of his philosophy find but a faint echo in yonder temple of Arunachala.

Even the word "God" is rarely on his lips.

He simply puts forward a way of self-analysis, which can be practised irrespective of any ancient or modern theories and beliefs which one may hold, a way that will finally lead man to true self-understanding.

I follow this process of self-divestment in the effort to arrive at pure integral being. Again and again I am aware that Maharshi's mind is imparting something to my own, though no words may be passing between us.

I return hastily from an exploration of some usually veiled sanctuaries of the great temple and enter the hall when the evening meditation period has run out half its life. I slip quietly to the floor and straightway assume my regular meditation posture. In a few seconds I compose myself and bring all wandering thoughts to a strong centre. An intense interiorization of consciousness comes with the closing of eyes.

Maharshi's seated form floats in a vivid manner before my mind's eye. Following his frequently repeated instruction I endeavour to pierce through the mental picture into that which is formless, his real being and inner nature, his soul. To my surprise the effort meets with almost instantaneous success and the picture disappears again, leaving me with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of his intimate presence.

The mental questionings which have marked most of my earlier meditations have lately begun to cease. I have repeatedly interrogated my consciousness of physical, emotional and mental sensations in turn, but, dissatisfied in the quest of self, have eventually left them all. I have

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then applied the attention of consciousness to its own centre, striving to become aware of its place of origin. Now comes the supreme moment. In that concentration of stillness, the mind withdrawn into itself, one's familiar world begins to fade off into shadowy vagueness. One is apparently environed for a while by sheer nothingness, having arrived at a kind of mental blank wall.

To-night I flash swiftly to this point, with barely a skirmish against the continuous sequence of thoughts which usually play the prelude to its arrival. Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bear me inwards with resistless speed. The first great battle is over, almost without a stroke, and a pleasurable, happy, easeful feeling succeeds its high tension.

In the next state I stand apart from the intellect, conscious that it is thinking, but warned by an intuitive voice that it is merely an instrument. I watch these thoughts with a weird detachment. The power to think, which has hitherto been a matter for merely ordinary pride, now becomes a thing from which to escape, for I perceive with startling clarity that I have been its unconscious captive. There follows the sudden desire to stand outside the intellect and just *be*. I want to dive into a place deeper than thought. I want to know what it will feel like to deliver myself from the constant bondage of the brain, but to do so with all my attention awake and alert.

Feeling that I have found the birthplace of thinking, I let go of the powerfully positive attitude which has brought my attention to this point and surrender myself to complete passivity, yet still keeping as intently watchful as a snake of its prey.

The waves of thought naturally begin to diminish. The workings of logical rational sense drop towards zero

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point. The strongest sensation I have experienced till now grips me. Time seems to reel dizzily as the antennæ of my rapidly growing intuition begin to reach out into the unknown. The reports of my bodily senses are no longer heard, felt, remembered. I know that at any moment I shall be standing outside things, on the very edge of the world's secret. . . . .

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts. I perceive, what I have suspected for some time and what Maharshi has confidently affirmed, that the mind takes its rise in a transcendental source. The brain has passed into a state of complete suspension, as it does in deep sleep, yet there is not the slightest loss of consciousness. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed radiant self. For, something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which *was* I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and *becomes* me. With it arrives an amazing new sense of absolute freedom, for thought is like a loom-shuttle which is always going to and fro, and to be freed from its tyrannical motion is to step out of prison into the open air.

I find myself outside the rim of world-consciousness. The planet, which has so far harboured me, disappears. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. The latter, I feel rather than think, is the primæval stuff out of which worlds are created, the first state of matter. It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly alive.

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I touch, as in a flash, the meaning of this mysterious universal drama which is being enacted in space and then return to the primal point of my being. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday's bitter memories and to-morrow's anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity. My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

Maharshi's eyes glow like twin stars through the half-darkness. I remind myself that never have I met in any man eyes as remarkable as those of this last descendant of India's Rishis. In so far as the human eyes can mirror divine power, it is a fact that the sage's do that.

We now understand each other better without words, for in this profound silence our minds approach a beautiful harmony, and in this optic telegraphy I receive a clear unuttered message. Now that I have caught a wonderful and memorable glimpse of Maharshi's view-point on life, my own inner life has begun to mingle with his."

———

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APPENDIX

Maharshi has given his devotees a full opportunity to study the psychological aspect of religious genius in general, and of self-realisation in particular. For this purpose he gave a detailed account of his earlier and later fits (which were mistaken by some people to import divine and mysterious virtue) and showed how they were connected with his own real nature and personality. A frank examination of the psychological and physiological facts about Maharshi, far from damaging his reputation, sets it on a firmer basis. Somnambulism, etc., may be common to the ordinary man and the religious genius, but in the case of the genius, nervous instability is utilised to attain sudden flights of spirituality; and the pre-existent strength of character enables the genius to continue at those high levels. Maharshi had realisation of the Self very early in life. The most important thing thereafter was to make this realisation a habit,—to convert his *Samadhi* into *Sahaja Samadhi* or *Sahajasthithi*. Interruptions are possible to *Samadhi*, but not to *Sahaja Samadhi*. The account Maharshi gave of his last fit well establishes the habitual or *Sahaja* character of his *samadhi*. Hence an account of that fit may be given here.

One morning about twenty-five years ago the Swami, Palaniswamy, Vasudeva Sastri and others left the Virupaksha cave and proceeded together to Pachaiamman Koil taking oil and soap-nut powder for an oil-bath, as facilities for such a bath were ample at that place. The bath over, they started back, cutting a path for themselves across the hill. The bath and the walk were already overstraining the

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Swami's nerves. The sun was fairly hot (about 10 A.M.) and the climbing was an additional strain. Palaniswamy and Sastri had gone some steps in advance. While the Swami was near (ஆமைப்பாறை) the tortoise rock, he began to feel faint and what followed is best given in Swami's own words.

"Suddenly the view of natural scenery in front of me disappeared and a bright white curtain was drawn across the line of my vision and shut out the view of nature. I could distinctly see the gradual process. At one stage I could see a part of the prospect of nature yet clear, and the rest was being covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing on a slide across one's view in the stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking, lest I should fall. When it cleared, I walked on. When darkness and faintness overtook me a second time, I leaned against a rock until it cleared. And again for the third time, I felt it safest to sit and I sat near the rock. Then the bright white curtain had completely shut out my vision, my head was swimming, and my blood circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death-like hue—and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva Sastri took me in fact to be dead, held me in his embrace and began to weep aloud and lament my death. His body was shivering. I could at that time distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering, his words of lamentation and understand their meaning. I also *saw* the discoloration of my skin and I felt the stoppage of my circulation and respiration, and the increased chillness of the extremities of my body. Yet my usual current of (Dhyana) "thought"* was continuing as usual, in that state also. I was not afraid in the least, nor

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* *i e.*, Sahajasamadhi or perennial self-realisation.

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ERRATA

PAGE	LINE	FOR		READ
8	23	*gun*	...	*gam*
12	17	wordly	...	worldly
20	15	briug	...	bring
23	4	vermillion	...	vermilion
26	15	unwordly	...	unworldly
35	6	Tiruvana	...	Tiruvanna
42	31	2161	...	216
51	20	*illuppai*	...	*iluppai*
78	33	57	...	54
79	3	unwordly	...	unworldly
89	22	when	...	whence
121	1	land	...	and
138	15	रजलो		रचलो
141	6	masonry	...	masonary
144	4	यिद्व		विद्व
145	9	we	...	he
149	7	peopled	...	people
150	28	persumably	...	presumably
161	24	darling	...	daring
168	3	effects of	...	effects
170	33	hat	...	that
193	7	up	...	up for
193	9	for up	...	up
221	33	thees	...	these
226	17	भिज्ञां		भिक्षां
237	9	llu	...	illu

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